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ABSTRACT

This report provides a synopsis of the scientific information available at present on the beneficial effects of European pre-school education. The analysis also deals with the organisational characteristics of those institutions achieving the most positive results. The second part presents descriptive reports on the situation in each of the European Community Member States, together with a comparative summary based on available information. There is a need to move beyond the antagonistic relationship between the family and pre-school education. Considerable research shows that the essential question to be examined is how pre-school education centers can complement and support the family's educational efforts. The report is divided into two parts. Part 1, "The Contribution of Scientific Research," includes: (1) "The Effects of Attendance at Pre-School Provision"; (2) "Facilities and Conditions in Pre-School Provision"; and (3) "Conclusions." Part 2, "Early Years Provision in the Education Systems of the European Union," presents synopses of pre-school education systems in the Member States. (Contains 53 references.) (EH)

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Studies

No 6

Pre-school Education in the European Union

Current thinking and provision

SO 027 315

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FOREWORD

There can be little doubt that history will remember the twentieth century for the recognition of the importance of the first years in a child's development. Work carried out in the field of genetic psychology throughout this century has profoundly changed the traditional view of early childhood: previously essentially a subject of care, for the most part, the young child has become the subject of education.

For several years, pre-school education has been a topic of discussions which have dealt not only with the issue of the place of women in society, but also with the role which attendance at institutions with an educational purpose can play in the development of young children and in their subsequent integration into school. The importance of the issue is recognised by the relevant authorities in all the Member States of the European Union, and measures aimed at the development of this level of education are being taken by most of them.

Knowing the extent to which this question is being discussed, the Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth of the European Commission has had this study of it undertaken. The report provides a synopsis of the scientific information available at present on the beneficial effects of pre-school education. The analysis also deals with the organisational characteristics of those institutions which, according to the results of the research, achieve the most positive results.

As a complement to this, the EURYDICE European Unit, with the help of the EURYDICE network, has prepared a detailed description of the present situation as regards educational provision catering for children between the age of 2 years and their entry to compulsory primary education. The second part of the document presents descriptive reports on the situation in each of the Member States, together with a comparative summary based on the available information.

This study demonstrates that there is a need today to move beyond the antagonistic relationship between the family and pre-school education. In fact, a considerable amount of research has shown that the essential question to be examined is how pre-school education centres can complement and support the family's educational efforts.

We hope that this study will receive attention from all those who are concerned with the quality of education for young children.

Dr T. O'Dwyer
Director General
Task Force Human Resources,
Education, Training, Youth

December 1994

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PART I

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

Pre-school education is the subject of lively debate at the present time, bringing into play two current issues in particular - the role of women in society and the view of what is considered desirable in the area of the education of young children.

The last three decades will undoubtedly go down in history as a period in which there was a strong social movement towards equality for women and men. In our industrialised societies, there are increasing signs that the roles of men and women are becoming more complementary and interchangeable. Social models have changed greatly. Nowadays, women are expected to combine family life harmoniously with work outside the home.

It would, however, be wrong to consider this change as the only explanation for the increase in the demand for pre-school education. A survey carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) on pre-school education throughout the world (Crahay, 1989) shows that the situation is much more complex. In Hong Kong, Belgium, Italy and Spain, the percentage of mothers who work is lower - and in some cases much lower - than attendance rates at pre-school education and childcare centres outside the family. On the other hand, the percentage of working mothers is higher than such attendance rates in other countries, and in particular in China, Thailand and Portugal. The United States is an intermediate case: the percentage of working mothers is higher there than the attendance rate at pre-school education centres, but lower than the rate for childcare outside the family.

Of even greater significance still is the fact that, when questioned about the reasons which led them to place their child in a pre-school education centre, some mothers stressed its importance for the child's psychological development, while others gave childcare problems or their work as the first reason. The following table indicates, for each country, the percentage of each type of reply.

Countries	Child's psychological benefit	Care problems	Other reasons
Hong Kong	100	0	0
Belgium	75	24	1
Italy	76	23	1
Spain	64	36	0
China	-	-	-
USA	44	49	7
Finland	19	80	1.2
Nigeria	28	67	4.6
Portugal	29	57	14.2
Thailand	20	80	0.4

The facts are clear. In countries with high rates of attendance at pre-school education centres, the percentage of mothers who mention the educational value of these childcare facilities is high. Conversely, in countries with low attendance rates at pre-school education centres, mothers who avail themselves of these facilities place greater emphasis on their childcare problems. The situation therefore varies from one country to another. To summarise, it can be stated that, in some countries, mothers believe in the educational value of pre-school education centres. Demand in such countries for good quality childcare facilities is high. A sign of the importance these mothers attach to pre-school education centres is the fact that a significant number of mothers at home place their children in such centres for part of the day. On the other hand, in other countries, confidence in pre-school education centres is lower and when, because of their work, mothers are obliged to use the centres for their children, they refer to their childcare problems, thereby suggesting that if they could avoid using them, they would.

It is also important to note that in several Western countries (France and Belgium, especially), it is the socio-economically advantaged families in particular who choose to send their children to a pre-school education centre from a very early age. It is clear therefore that the debate on pre-school education involves considerations about the role of women in society and opinions on the desirability of pre-school education.

There is no doubt that all specialists are convinced of the importance of the first years of life for the individual's psychological development. The works of Piaget, Bloom and McV. Hunt frequently stress the fact that the cognitive development of children depends on the quality of the stimulation provided during early infancy. It would however be an exaggeration still to say that all is determined before the age of six. We know today that the situation is much more complex. American research into pre-school education aimed at compensating socio-cultural handicaps (see the compensatory education movement) shows that the effect of pre-school education must be seen in a new light. According to Suzanne Gray (1974), we have for too long tended to believe that attendance at a pre-school education centre could immunise children against everything that might go against them during primary or secondary education. In short, up to the end of the 1980s, there was a tendency, according to this author, to believe that pre-school education was like a vaccination which, once administered to the child, could enable him to overcome all subsequent education problems.

Today, the best informed researchers tend to favour an interactive approach, sometimes called transactional or ecological. The model of L. Schweinhart and D. Weikart is possibly more developed. These American researchers noted that children from ethnic minority backgrounds succeeded in school when they had received pre-school education. More specifically, they noted that those who had received pre-school education succeeded much better than their classmates who had remained at home with their family. Nevertheless, the effects of such compensatory actions on intelligence quotients disappear rapidly.

L. Schweinhart and D. Weikart formulated the hypothesis that this temporary increase in the cognitive ability of the pupils "mediatised" social effects. Disadvantaged children who have benefited from pre-school education enter primary school with a better aptitude for education. They thereby impress their teachers who develop much more positive expectations of them than of their disadvantaged classmates who have not had the benefit of pre-school education. Children can sense the fact that adults expect a lot of them, and they direct their energy at trying to confirm the positive expectations of which they are the object. In short, pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds who begin primary education with more finely tuned cognitive skills will, by this very fact, turn in a positive direction the series of interactions to which they are subject. Sensitive to the positive image which the teachers have formed of them, they will adopt the attitudes and the role of the good pupil. The positive image which the teacher has of these pupils will also influence their parents and, naturally, the expectations of the parents for their children.

In short, for these researchers, pre-school education has long-term effects in as far as it influences the quality of the interactions which will be beneficial to the child throughout primary and secondary education.

Today, there is a tendency to move away from radical and exaggerated opposing positions and from excessively cut and dried views. No doubt it was useful to proclaim that the whole of the child's development was determined by what happened before the age of 6 when there was little concern among the public or policy makers regarding the education of young children. Now that the importance of the first years of life is universally recognised, there is more justification for advocating the importance of an educationally rich and stimulating environment at all ages of psychological development. There is therefore no reason to neglect pre-school education but, at the same time, it must not be made to bear the full burden of the success or failure of education as a whole. Good quality pre-school education must be linked to good quality primary and secondary education.

The rivalry between school and family is another of the entrenched positions which should be abandoned. Many researchers today would prefer to look at this problem in terms of complementarity. How can pre-school education centres best respond to the demands made by families while ensuring an environment which provides ample stimulation for young children? How can institutionalised centres of pre-school education complement families' educational action?

This report presents a summary of the results of studies on the medium and long-term effects of pre-school education by looking at specific target groups (children from deprived backgrounds, handicapped children, etc.) and variations in context (organisation of groups, type of curriculum, staff training, etc.). The problems addressed here are therefore dependent on the areas covered by the scientific research.

The report does not provide any detail on the research methods. Studies were chosen for their quality. When they present problems of validity, this is mentioned. How pre-school education is defined varies from one country to the other. The studies dealt with here generally examine the effects of the educational structures and programmes provided for children between the ages of 3 and 6 years.

The following table shows the structure of the present document, which is in two parts. The first part explains **why** it is important to promote pre-school education; the second part seeks to set out **how** this service could be developed, by analysing various consequences and conditions with respect to organisational matters and the training of staff.

THE EFFECTS OF ATTENDANCE AT PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION

Effects on the child's success at school and development

- Success at school for children from socially deprived backgrounds
- Motivation and school behaviour
- The impact of family support
- Beneficial effects for all children, regardless of social background
- The advantages of a long period of pre-school education
- Overall confirmation of the effects in other contexts

Effects on social integration and success in later life

- Reduction in delinquency rates
- Pregnancy and drop-out rates
- Social responsibility and success in employment

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FACILITIES AND CONDITIONS IN PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION

Group size and staffing ratios

- Effects on verbal interactions and educational activities

The quality of educational activities

- The programme or model for educational action
- Organisation of activities and management of the groups

The educational team: The role of training and the importance of stability

- The effects on social and language development

Involvement of the family in educational activities

- Family-centred intervention projects

A. THE EFFECTS OF ATTENDANCE AT PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION

1. Effects on the child's success at school and development

Success at school for children from deprived backgrounds

Several American studies were carried out in the 1970s following the compensatory education movement. This movement pursued the objective of supporting children from deprived backgrounds in their schooling through educational action both in centres and in the children's families. This provided an ideal test-bed for evaluating the effects of educational intervention on success at school. The efficiency criteria generally adopted in studies are maintenance in ordinary education, as opposed to transfer to special education, and promotion to the next class, as opposed to repeating the year. These criteria provide a rigorous and tangible indicator of the acceptability of the child's performance in the educational establishment (Lazar, 1977).

All these studies have been compiled and compared in the framework of the **Consortium for Longitudinal Studies**. Analysis of the data reveals that pre-school education programmes have a perceptible effect. The intervention reduced the number of pupils who had to be placed in special schools and lowered the rates of those who had to repeat the year. On the basis of these data, Lazar concluded that "... early education programs can in some way improve the ability of low-income children to meet the requirements of their school" (1977, p. 28). But what is this ability?

The researchers involved in the **Consortium for Longitudinal Studies** stated that, although participation in a pre-school education programme had a positive influence on the children's intelligence quotients, such influence was short-lived (two or three years). A series of studies evaluating the **Head Start** programme confirmed this finding (CSR, 1985). After one year, the differences between the children who had taken part in the programme and those who had not continued to be significant in terms of the criteria of their educational attainment. On the other hand, there was very little difference in the results of the two groups in intelligence tests. After two years, there were no longer any differences in their intellectual skills.

However, the intelligence quotient at 6 years of age is a significant determining factor for future school performance, in terms of avoiding the need for placement in special education. In the view of the **Consortium for Longitudinal Studies**, intervention at the pre-school stage can therefore be considered to have an influence on the intellectual skills of the children at a critical period - when they first enter school. Subsequently, other factors come into play to explain the reasons for success at school.

Motivation and school behaviour

Studies carried out into the effects of pre-school education have frequently used intelligence quotient and academic performance, as measured by standardised tests, as evaluation criteria. However, children's capacity to apply their intellectual skills appears even more important than pure ability evaluated out of context. This line of reasoning has led a number of researchers to focus more on children's attitudes towards learning and their willingness to take on intellectual challenges.

Children's social and emotional development is another important factor in their general development. For Beller (1983), the major problems confronting society today are linked to problems in the social and emotional areas. The existence of disadvantaged groups in society is a reflection not so much of problems of intellectual development as of shortcomings in the application of these skills.

From this point of view, Beller examined the impact of pre-school education on socio-affective development and motivation. In order to determine whether some children benefited more from the pre-school experience, he looked at the effects in terms of the child's sex and family setting.

Beller's study forms part of the research analysed by the **Consortium for Longitudinal Studies**. The children involved came from highly disadvantaged social backgrounds. The findings in relation to intellectual skills confirmed those obtained by other studies examined by Lazar *et al*. In terms of motivation, children who attended pre-school provision showed fewer inhibitions than others, on entry to primary school. They were better able to express their need for assistance, recognition and contact. They were also more inclined to act independently.

For a series of variables, including maturity of moral judgement and motivation, the effects are greater in the case of girls than of boys. The author attributes this difference to the fact that black American mothers in socially disadvantaged families tend to assume the role of head of family. He also pointed out that these mothers give more support to girls than boys at the pre-school age. Beller concludes that children benefit more from the pre-school experience if they are in a family which supports them and reinforces their motivation.

The impact of family support

A great many authors of reviews of the published work and of large-scale studies conclude that parent involvement plays a significant role in pre-school intervention.

Lazar and Darlington (1979) conclude that actions involving parents bring about a change in the family environment and increase the aspirations both of the parents for their children and of the children themselves. The authors include in their explanatory schema a new element - that the effects of pre-school action on children's schooling may be an indirect result of an increase in the parents' awareness and skills in relation to the education system.

This hypothesis is consistent with the views of Bronfenbrenner (1974), who advances the thesis that pre-school education plays a role in the child's development only **if the family micro-system is influenced**. It is as though the child was incapable, on its own, of assimilating the motivation and aspirations which are conducive to its development, these elements having to be assimilated by the parents and passed on to the child.

Gray's study (1974) confirms the importance of pre-school education for the child's immediate circle. The author reports that the younger siblings of children who had been targeted by the action obtained better results in IQ tests than the siblings of children who had not had the advantage of such intervention. It would appear that the parents remembered and continued to apply to their younger children some of what they had learned in the course of the action (aspirations, awareness of the role of education, etc.).

Various observations have shown that pre-school education has no long-term effect on cognitive development. This fact, taken in conjunction with the impact of intervention on the families, led Lazar and Darlington to formulate an important hypothesis, to the effect that **pre-school education has an impact on intellectual functioning at the point of entry to school. Subsequently, other variables which contribute to success at school are in turn influenced by this impact: motivation to succeed, attitudes in class, and parents' perceptions and aspirations.**

Again in the United States, Schweinhart and Weikart (1980), the authors of the **Perry Preschool Longitudinal Study**, confirmed and clarified this hypothesis. According to the data they collected, pre-school education influences cognitive skills in the short-term at the start of primary school, and these skills influence the child's behaviour and aspirations. The links between these and success at school are thereafter determined as follows: the positive attitude developed by the child is reinforced by the immediate family, which provides support and help leading to success at school. Pre-school education itself has no effect, but it acts as a basic element influencing the dynamics between the child and others - teacher, peers and also family.

By **increasing the cognitive skills necessary** at the beginning of primary school, pre-school education helps the child to construct for itself a role which leads to success at school, and it leads others (teachers, parents and peers) to form and communicate expectations which maintain and reinforce the child in this role. From this point of view, aspirations, performance and social and family support are three aspects of a dynamic interaction between the individual child and its immediate circle.

Even if there is a link between the effects of pre-school education and the influence of the family, this does not necessarily mean that all pre-school education programmes must include parent involvement.

In any event, it is important to consider how such action is implemented. In the light of examination of the research carried out by White, Taylor and Moss (1992), the general consensus that programmes involving parents are more effective than others must be qualified, if not questioned.

Their criticisms concerned firstly methodology, as not all of the studies undertaken were of a high quality. Next, the results obtained did not show major differences between the groups with and without parental involvement. Frequently, the differences were not significant.

White, Taylor and Moss (1992) therefore compiled only those studies which directly tested the effects of parental involvement by taking two strictly comparable groups of children, one with parental involvement and the other without. There are obviously far fewer such studies, especially after the elimination of those which presented problems of validity. However, even without dwelling on their quality, the findings of the various studies tended to contradict each other, and in general the differences between the two groups were not significant.

The consensus as to the beneficial effects of parental involvement in pre-school programmes developed for disadvantaged or handicapped children generally goes far beyond the actual research findings. However, existing research does not nearly cover the entire field of investigation. White, Taylor and Moss (1992) stress that, in the vast majority of studies, parental involvement is planned in the same way. Parents themselves are encouraged to teach their children specific skills (motor and language skills, for instance). Other types of parental involvement could also yield beneficial effects: emotional support, fostering satisfactory parent-child relationships, help in the use of local resources (care, facilities and nutritional services for example), but these types of provision are rarely mentioned in any of the programmes evaluated.

Farran (1990) made a clearer distinction between the impact of actions involving the parents of socially deprived and of physically handicapped children. The author explains that a child's handicap requires adaptation of the immediate surroundings. It is here that intervention appears most relevant, enabling parents and teachers to benefit from the knowledge of professionals on how to work with the child according to the individual handicap. In their large-scale study, Shonkoff and Hauser-Cram (1987) had included the findings of studies on this particular question. They concluded that providing information on educational activities which can be carried out in the home has a significant impact on the way in which handicapped children are able to perform.

For children from socially deprived backgrounds, the lines of action are less clearly drawn. As soon as the social environment, and not the child, is identified as the risk factor in the child's development, intervention should be aimed directly at this environment. Instead of showing parents the kind of educational activities to offer their children, it would be more useful to approach them with a view to supporting them and contributing to their own personal development (Farran, 1990).

The involvement of parents as direct participants complementing a high quality educational programme in a pre-school centre does not, therefore, seem to be the most effective approach. Once again, the thesis advanced by Schweinhart and Weikart (1980) helps to explain this observation. In the case of socially deprived children, the long-term effects of pre-school education derive from an interaction, resulting from mutual reinforcement, between the child's success and the parents' hopes for progress and development. We can thus see that **it is more a matter of changing attitudes than of introducing any specific activities at home**. An educational programme carried out in a good pre-school centre can, through its effects on the children's skills, make a major contribution to bringing about such a change in attitude.

There are some studies illustrating to some extent the influence of attitudes in interactions between child, parents and teachers, although the population of socially deprived children is not the same as in the American studies. The German study by Tiedemann and Faber (1992) focused on the child's perception of the mother's support, and it examined the relationship between the mother's support as perceived by the child (encouragement of independence, stimulation of interest in learning, consolation, or expression of pride) and measurements of development. The measurements included pre-counting, perception and language skills at pre-school level, and academic performance in mathematics, reading, and writing. The statistics show that, given equal levels of intelligence, the mother's support has a direct effect on both pre-school cognitive skills and academic performance. On the other hand, indicators such as the mother's strictness, as perceived by the child, and its age and sex, have little or no effect on the variables analysed.

The effect of the child's attitudes on its teachers' perceptions, and consequently on its success at school, is also a determining factor. The results of a Belgian study of the assessment practices of primary school teachers are extremely telling. When the effect of socio-economic background was monitored, the marks teachers gave depended as much on their assessment of the pupil's attitude and behaviour (participation in class, in particular) as on the academic ability of the pupil as demonstrated in an external test (Grisay, 1992).

Beneficial effects for all children, regardless of social background

Osborn and Milbank (1987) have shown that children in the United Kingdom who attended some form of pre-school provision had better cognitive skills, were more successful at school and had fewer behaviourial problems than those who did not attend an establishment of any kind. This positive effect was observed whatever the children's background. The advantages were marginally higher for socially deprived children, but the difference was relatively minor in comparison to the general benefits of pre-school education for all children.

Nonetheless, there were differences in the different types of services provided. Osborn and Milbank found inequalities in the use of the different services. Children and families with the greatest need of support from outside the family were those who had the least chance of obtaining it. The majority of children from socially deprived backgrounds attended local nurseries where the staff had to cater for larger numbers of children and with inadequate resources.

This inequality in the use of the services is brought out by other authors as well. Goelman and Perce (1988) showed that, in Canada, children from families with limited educational and financial resources attended poorer quality services. They were more frequently placed in mediocre family situations where they watched television, had fewer educational activities, and received less exposure to reading.

A recent study conducted in Spain examined whether the child's development depended on the quality of living conditions at home and in childcare centres (Perez-Pereira, 1992). The findings demonstrated that mothers with a high level of professional qualifications chose pre-school provision of a better quality with respect to the creative and motor activities offered.

The unequal use of services is also apparent in quantitative terms. Osborn and Milbank showed that, in the United Kingdom, some 44% of socially deprived children received no form of pre-school education whatsoever, as compared to 10% of children from the most fortunate backgrounds.

It can thus be concluded, as did Hayes (1992), that **it is not enough to provide services for all children. Great care must be taken to make these services attractive to parents and to ensure that the children's experience there is both relevant and meaningful.**

The advantages of a long period of pre-school education

A recent study carried out in Sweden on children's age on entry to childcare facilities produced some interesting results (Andersson, 1992). The children who as one-year-olds attended child-care facilities, in either a family or a centre, obtained better school results and had higher verbal and non-verbal skills at age 8. At age 13, the differences were still apparent.

Corrected average scores according to age of entry to childcare

	Age on entry to non-parent childcare facilities			At home
	0 - 1 years	1 - 2 years	2 years +	
Reading and writing (8 years)	14.3	12.0	12.0	12.6
General subjects (8 years)	3.4	3.3	2.9	3.1
Arithmetic (8 years)	10.8	9.8	9.6	10.4
School performance (8 years)	10.6	9.5	9.2	9.6
Swedish (13 years)	10.6	10.4	9.6	9.1
General subjects (13 years)	10.7	9.7	9.3	9.0
Mathematics (13 years)	11.1	9.6	9.1	9.2
School performance (13 years)	41.6	39.8	37.0	35.9
English (13 years)	10.2	10.1	9.0	8.3

The analysis also shows that there are very clear links between early entry to pre-school provision and socio-affective skills (adjustment to school and social skills), as assessed by the teachers, at age 8 and age 13. As in previous studies, analysis of the links between age of entry and skills includes monitoring of socio-economic levels. The age of entry to a centre is in fact significantly determined by the socio-economic status of the family - the better off the family, the earlier the children are sent to pre-school provision - and by family composition, with earlier placement of children from single parent families.

Andersson stresses the study's limitations. She takes no account of parental attitudes and values or of parents' behaviour towards their children. She hypothesises that parents who do not themselves look after their children compensate for their absence by providing more educational stimulation. This does not, however, cast doubt on the results obtained, which are favourable to long-term non-parent childcare. Nonetheless, prudence is called for when making generalisations regarding the effects without taking account of the variables concerning parental opinions and behaviour.

Recently published French statistics also show a clear relationship between the duration of attendance at nursery schools (1, 2 or 3 years) and the rates of promotion of pupils at school (as opposed to rates of repeating the year). Analyses of a sample of approximately 16 000 pupils showed that the greater the number of years spent in nursery school classes, the lower the rates of repeating of first year primary (Duthoit, 1988). The reduction is very pronounced between 0 and 1 year of attendance (from 30.5% to 18.3%). The differences then fall gradually for 1, 2, 3 and 4 years of attendance (from 18.3% to 14.5%, 10.4% then 10%). This trend is valid for all socio-economic groups, but, in absolute terms, the gains are more significant in the disadvantaged social groups which have the highest rates of repeating the year.

	Socio-economic Groups				
	Upper	Middle	Deprived	Overall	Numbers
No pre-primary education	17.8	17.8	36.1	30.5	300
1 year	5.0	13.5	24.7	18.3	1855
2 years	4.2	10.4	21.2	14.5	4313
3 years	2.8	6.7	17.3	10.4	7931
4 years	1.1	5.8	17.2	10.0	1776
All durations	3.1	8.7	20.0	12.8	16521*

* For 346 pupils, the length of nursery school attendance is unknown.

According to Duthoit, extending the duration of attendance is most beneficial when the mother does not work. In the author's view, the decision to send a child to a pre-school centre for a fairly lengthy period is a good indicator of the level of importance which the family attaches to education. Where the mother does not work, this indicator takes on its full significance. It can therefore be assumed that **the relationship between the length of pre-school education and the reduction in rates of repeating of the year is partly due to the degree of importance which the family attributes to education, independent of socio-economic background**. In general, studies on the duration of pre-school education unfortunately do not take this variable into consideration.

Another French survey on a sample of 1 900 children showed that the longer the period of nursery school education, the greater the gains in the skills of the pupils (Jarousse, Mingat, Richard, 1992). Comparing the performance of pupils who started school at 2 and at 3 years of age, there is a particularly marked difference in their skills in both mother tongue and mathematics. However, only a very small section of the population attends school at age 2 - 15% at the time of this survey (1986-89). The proportion of children from managerial and professional homes in this group is higher than in the group of children starting at ages 3 and 4. It is therefore important to eliminate the effect of the socio-economic factor when assessing the effects of school attendance for 2-year-olds.

Early schooling has a net positive effect (excluding of the weight of the socio-economic factor) on pupils' skills at the start of the first year primary (*cours préparatoire*). The advantage which children who started school at age 2 have over those who started at age 3 is significant, irrespective of the family's social background. This is the case for children from both advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. The effect remains positive when a comparison is made of the levels of attainment of pupils at the end of primary school. The authors therefore conclude that the advantage of school attendance at age 2 is sufficiently lasting for its effects to be detected in the longer term.

This thesis is not, however, universally accepted. It requires confirmation, as contradictory results have also appeared. Bernoussi, Florin and Khomsi (1992) have studied the effects of school attendance at the ages of 2 and 3 years on the development of cognitive skills and general school performance. This study does not show any significant differences between the two groups at the start of primary school (*Cours préparatoire*). Other studies are planned, based on questionnaires addressed to parents. These will help to refine the analysis by showing the different types of care the child has received prior to entering nursery school at age 3. A longitudinal study is currently under way.

Burchinal, Marvin and Craig (1989) examined the effects of two types of pre-school education on the cognitive development of children from very deprived social backgrounds. In this study, the children were divided up randomly into two groups. The first received pre-school education in a university centre. Attendance at the centre was the maximum possible, with 52 months of attendance for children aged 54 months. The second group was the control group.

In this group, some of the children were placed by their parents in a local pre-school centre which operated under the same conditions as the centre supervised by the university, but with less emphasis on improving cognitive skills. The length of time spent by the children at the centre varied greatly. Accordingly, for purposes of the analysis, the control group was divided into two subgroups, one of children who attended the centre for more than a year and the other of those who attended for less than a year.

The results show that the intensive experience in the university centre was the most conclusive. Furthermore, experience of at least a year in a local centre had a favourable influence on the cognitive development of the children. Those who had no pre-school education were well below the average.

This comparison of the two subgroups gives rise, however, to a problem of methodology. Although the children were placed randomly in the two original groups, it was the parents who decided how long they would have them attend the local centre. The study did not monitor the reasons for their choice. It could be due to increased awareness of the importance of education, and this would explain in part the greater degree of intellectual development. Only the comparison between the first two groups is completely valid. It tended to show a positive effect of attendance at the university centre, but it could not determine whether this was due to the duration of the children's attendance or the quality of the educational activities provided.

Nieman and Gastright (1975) studied the duration of attendance at a pre-school institution. This study assessed the attainments of five groups of children.

- The first group did not attend any centre.
- The second attended a pre-school centre for approximately 600 hours per year.
- The third attended a *Kindergarten*-type establishment on a half-time basis (600 hours per year).
- The fourth attended a *Kindergarten*-type establishment on a full-time basis (1200 hours per year).
- The fifth attended a *Kindergarten*-type establishment and a pre-school centre (for a total of 1800 hours per year).

The data show significantly better results for children who attended a centre as compared to those who did not. The differences between the children who attended a centre on a half-time basis and on a full-time basis are also significant. Finally, the children in the last group obtained significantly better results than those in the fourth group. The duration of attendance would therefore appear to be decisive, but once again, the reasons which led the families to choose one or other option are not known.

Overall confirmation of the effects in other contexts

Several studies carried out in developing countries provide overall confirmation of the positive effects of pre-school education (Myers, 1985). Some of these studies associate pre-school education with education on nutrition. Most take as the criterion promotion to the next class (10 out of 17), the age of entry to first year primary (6 out of 17), or performance in academic school tasks (reading and writing in 14 out of 17). The effects are as follows.

Promotion/repeating rates: seven studies (Brazil, *PRAOPE, 1986*; Colombia, *The Bogota Study, 1983*; India, *ICDS Evaluation, 1986*; Argentina and Colombia, *1982*; Brazil, *Fortaleza, 1982*; South Africa, *Althone, 1985*) found a significantly positive effect, one study (Colombia, *The Cali Study, 1983*) a fairly positive effect, and two studies (Morocco, *1984*; Peru, *PUNO Project, 1985*) found no differences between children who had been involved and those who had not. It should be mentioned that, in Morocco, a quota system limiting admissions may conceal the effects of the pre-school education programme. Furthermore, in Peru, the children involved were not strictly paired with those who were not, and comparisons are therefore unreliable.

Age of entry to first year primary: four studies (Colombia, *The Bogota Study, 1983*; India, *The Dolman Project, 1987*; Argentina *1982*; and Chile, *1982*) indicate a significantly positive effect, while two such studies show a negligible effect (Bolivia and Colombia, *1982*).

Academic performance: nine studies (India, *The Dolman Project, 1987*; India, *ICDS Evaluation, 1986*; Colombia, *PROMEAS Project, 1986*; Argentina, *1982*; Turkey, *1987*; Morocco, *1984*; Chile, *Osorno, 1989*; Peru, *PUNO Project, 1985* and South Africa, *Althone, 1985*) refer to significantly positive effects. Of these, one study (Morocco, *1984*) noted a short-term effect which decreased after two years. Two studies referred to a negligible effect

(Chile, *1982* and Colombia, *1982*) and one study noted no differences between the groups (Brazil, *Fortaleza, 1982*). The studies which noted negligible effects for one or other of the criteria (Chile, *1982*; Colombia, *1982*; Bolivia, *1984*; Brazil, *Fortaleza, 1982*) unfortunately did not specify the type of education provided.

Social development: four studies dealt with this aspect (Columbia, *The Bogota Study (1983)*; India, *1986*; Turkey, *1987*; and South Africa, *1985*). The first shows positive effects on the children's level of activity, sense of cooperation and familiarity with school behaviour in interaction with adults. The second mentions positive effects on school behaviour. The third study notes a number of significant differences linked to school attendance and also to the training of the mothers. The last study also notes positive results.

Several of the studies referred to have methodological shortcomings in relation to the sampling procedure, measurement of ability, and follow-up in the primary classes; the allocation of children to primary classes was not monitored, and the criterion of success may vary from one school to another.

Conclusions

The majority of the above-mentioned studies refer to the positive role of pre-school education in terms of both reducing rates of repeating the year and improving academic skills.

This effect has been brought out particularly clearly in the case of socially deprived children. It is, however, not a direct effect. It would be wrong simply to consider that the children who have had the benefit of this experience are vaccinated for life against failure at school through some increase in their intellectual aptitudes. It has been established that pre-school education has an influence on these aptitudes in the short term. Other intermediate factors also come into play. The most obvious is the child's immediate circle.

The short-term impact on aptitudes is enough to change the child's aspirations and attitudes. This change has implications for the family, peers and teachers; it alters their perception of the child's potential and this in turn leads to higher expectations of, and special support for, the child. Several studies attest to the importance of family attitudes for the child's development and success at school. This means that the long-term effect of pre-school education is brought about by the change in attitudes and aspirations of those in the child's immediate circle.

Direct action involving the parents and providing them with educational activities to be carried out at home does not, however, appear to be the most effective approach when it is complementary to educational programmes offered by a good pre-school centre. It would be interesting to undertake research into those programmes which offer other types of intervention directed at, for example, altering attitudes to education or offering help in the use of local resources. On the other hand, in the case of physically handicapped children, it appears much more useful to provide parents and teachers with information on activities directed at the specific handicap.

Regardless of the child's social background, the length of pre-school education also seems to play a role. The longer the period of attendance at a good quality centre, the better the child's performance. However, it should not be concluded that pre-school education should automatically be extended. Sending a child early to a pre-school centre may be a reflection of the family's aspirations and interest in education, and the family's support for the child's work at school can also influence its educational performance later.

Any measure to extend the period of pre-school education must therefore have family support for such educational action, and this involves making the services attractive to all parents.

There is no doubt that families will appreciate the importance of pre-school education more if the quality of provision is high. An extension of its duration should therefore not be contemplated without reflecting on its structures and operating conditions which, as we will see later in this paper, determine to a large extent the quality of such services.

2. Effects on social integration and success in later life

Reduction in delinquency rates

The authors of the **Perry Preschool Longitudinal Study** formulated the hypothesis that pupils who invest a real effort in their school work and who are supported in this investment are obviously more likely to achieve educational objectives and to be successful at school (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1980). Later on, success at school turns into success in life. As the child has been successful at school, the adult is successful both in social life and at work. Analysis of the behaviour of children covered by the longitudinal study at age 15 does not show any special improvement in school behaviour (lateness, cheating, etc.) among the children who had attended a pre-school centre. On the other hand, it does show a reduction in serious punishments, such as detentions.

Other aspects of social integration have been examined. Pre-school education clearly has an effect in reducing delinquent behaviour. The young people who had had the advantage of such education committed fewer acts of delinquency; 43% of these had not committed any or only one, as against 25% of the other group. The ratio is reversed as regards chronic delinquency: 36% of those in the group which had pre-school education as against 52% of those in the other group. When the most serious acts of delinquency are examined, the pre-school group also appears to be less affected, with 35% as against 51% in the other group.

Pregnancy and drop-out rates

Data from the **Perry Preschool Project** are available concerning these young people at the age of 19 or 20 years (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1985). Analysis showed that the effects of pre-school education could be seen in other areas. The number of teenage pregnancies was almost twice as high for girls who had not attended pre-school education. However, another study, **The Early Training Project**, did not find any differences between the groups as regards girls becoming pregnant. On the other hand, it found that 88% of girls who had attended a pre-school centre continued their studies after the birth of their child, as against 33% in the other group.

Dropout rates in secondary education were 18% lower for the groups which had pre-school education (33% in the pre-school group, 51% in the other group). These results are confirmed by two other studies. They show differences in rates of dropout, which are lower by respectively 17% (**Rome Head Start Programme**) and 21% (**Early Training Project**) for the groups which had attended pre-school education (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1985).

Study	Programme Group	Control Group	p
Rome Head Start (at age 20)			
Placed in special education	11	25	.019
Repeated year	51	63	-
Dropped out of "high school"	50	67	.042
Perry Preschool (at age 19)			
Placed in special	37	50	-
educationRepeated year	35	40	-
Dropped out of "high school"	33	51	.034
Early Training (at age 18)			
Placed in special education	3	29	.004
Repeated year	53	69	-
Dropped out of "high school"	22	43	0.79

Social responsibility and success in employment

Schweinhart and Weikart (1993) recently published data on what had become of participants in the **Perry Preschool Project** by the age of 27. The statistics showed a particular effect on social responsibility. Only 7% of those who had attended the pre-school programme had been arrested five or more times, compared with 37% of the other group. The measures of socio-economic status (income, home ownership, use of social services, etc.) also came out in favour of pre-school education.

The authors also presented an estimate of the social costs (health, education, legal system, compensation for victims of violence, etc.) and concluded that, for every dollar invested in the pre-school programme, 7.16 dollars flowed back into the state treasury.

Teasdale and Berliner (1991) studied the educational levels and results in intelligence tests of 33 000 adult Danes born between 1967 and 1973. This showed a connection between ability and the geographical area in which they grew up. The proportions of children attending their *Kindergarten*-type establishments (called *bornehaver)* varies greatly from one area to another, according to the official statistics for 1975, the first year of publication of attendance rates by local authority areas. The authors therefore linked the rates of attendance at pre-school centres in the various areas and the intellectual development of the populations which had grown up there. As attendance rates at these establishments are very high in areas with a high population density and high incomes, the authors tested the relationship by controlling these socio-economic variables. They concluded that there was a positive correlation between attendance at a centre and educational and intellectual levels, irrespective of socio-economic background.

Conclusions

The effects of pre-school education leave their mark far beyond the primary school and on different areas of the individual's development, going beyond success at school and touching on various aspects of social integration. This is not to say that this positive impact on the life of the adolescent and the adult is a direct effect. Many other factors come into play, and it would be wrong simply to conclude that all is won or lost by the age of 6.

For Farran (1990), problems such as drug abuse, delinquency, school failure and illiteracy cannot be resolved solely by action at the level of deprived 4-year-olds. Even with a good quality pre-school programme, a great deal of work remains to be done at the level of the primary school. For example, no child should leave the fourth year of primary school without being able to read, and this principle clearly goes beyond the function of pre-school structures.

One of the variables most frequently used in analysing a pupil's educational career, and whether secondary education is continued or abandoned, is repeating the year. Holmes (1989), who compared the results of 63 studies, concluded that repeating the year had a negative effect on personal development and academic results. In a follow-up to the French longitudinal study already mentioned above, Duru-Bellat, Jarousse and Mingat (1993) have presented an analysis which indicates that repeating the first year of primary school has a lasting negative impact which continues into later education.

For very weak pupils made to repeat the first year of primary school, the likelihood of their going on to an upper secondary course at some stage is in fact very low (11%), as compared to weak pupils who do not repeat (19%), "average" pupils (42%), or good pupils (69%). Similar results have been found in Germany (Hildeschmidt, 1982, and Fischer, 1982).

A seemingly paradoxical situation must be mentioned here, in that the countries which have the most highly developed systems of pre-school education are also those which most resort to the practice of making pupils repeat a year. In such countries, repeating is frequently the consequence of a normative approach. Teachers do not assess the individual pupil against skills to be acquired, but against the other pupils in the class. It is presumably also this normative approach which tends to promote a particular form of pre-school education. In this situation, its role is to prepare pupils for the first year of primary education by evening out skills and attitudes. It appears as a prerequisite for entry to primary school.

The operation of these two levels of education are closely linked. **If, on the one hand, pre-school education plays a role in combating failure at school, the elimination of the practice of repeating the year could, on the other, certainly influence the role given to pre-school education. The beneficial effects of pre-school education are therefore partly dependent on the operation and quality of primary education.**

The practice of making pupils repeat a year in the course of a stage of education is being dropped in an increasing number of countries. It would be interesting to gauge the effects of this over the coming years.

B. FACILITIES AND CONDITIONS IN PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION

In the preceding chapters, it has been shown that pre-school education has an indirect positive influence on the child's success at school. It improves the child's intellectual skills in the short term and, as a result, alters the perceptions of the family circle regarding the child's potential. These perceptions in turn lead the family to give positive support to the child and its education. The quality of this education also plays a role in the process, and a good quality service will have more influence on parents' views. It has also been shown that when the facilities are good, pre-school education has longer-lasting effects on the child's social and cognitive skills.

This reveals the importance of the quality of provision, and leads to an examination of studies dealing with the effects of the facilities on children's development. Group size and staffing ratios, educational models, the training and stability of the education team, and the participation of the family in the educational activity will each be examined in turn.

1. Group size and staffing ratios

Effects on verbal interactions and educational activities

In Sweden, Palmerus (1991) examined the extent to which variations in the content and types of activities and social interaction within the educational team are linked to staffing ratios. In Sweden, the ideal ratio is 15 children to three adults, but the author recorded a number of situations in which the number of children per adult was higher by four.

The results are summarised in the form of a model which links the many variables that contribute to the quality of the provision. The more staff there are responsible for the children, the more the proportion of educational activities increases, with a reduction in the extent of pure childminding. The staff then organise such activities in groups of only a few children.

On the other hand, when the number of children per adult increases, the verbal initiatives taken by the child vis-à-vis the adult decrease and the number of initiatives taken by the adults vis-à-vis the children increases. This model also indicates that the child/adult ratios alone do not determine quality of provision. The staff must also be in sympathy with the objectives and working methods. This enables them to consider different methods of working together.

The Bruner study (1980), **The Oxford Pre-school Research Project**, also mentions the importance of staffing ratios. The ratios examined by Bruner fall into two categories - ratios of 8, 9 or 10 children per adult, and ratios of 5, 6 or 7 children per adult. The lower the ratio, the greater was the proportion of time spent in elaborate play activities and the more discussions there were between the children and the adults. The overall size of the group also influenced the activities observed. Bruner makes a distinction here between groups with less than 26 children, and those with more. The most notable difference found was in the proportion of elaborate play (play with structured material, art workshops and small-scale constructions), with 70% in the smaller groups as against 50% in the larger ones.

Conclusions

The studies which take account of child/adult ratios and class size base their analyses on comparisons of relatively specific data. The Swedish and English ratios mentioned are particularly favourable. In his summary on the quality of provision for young children, Clarke-Stewart (1982) set the upper limit at 12 children per adult for the older children, and the upper limit for group size at 25 children.

In nursery school classes with between 20 and 25 children per teacher, the problems caused by the very low staffing ratio can be solved by organising the class in small groups of more independent children. The impact of such organisation is described in the following chapter.

Discussion of the quality of pre-school education must also take into account other factors relating to organisation. The composition of groups is one. Some centres bring together children of very different ages, while others opt for more homogeneous groups. It would also be interesting to assess the effects of differences in the management of time in pre-school education. This varies considerably from one Member State to another, in relation to both the number of hours per week and the number of days per year.

2. The quality of educational activities

The programme or model for educational action

The **Head Start Planned Variation** is a study which compares the effects of twelve different programmes of activities carried out as part of the compensatory education movement (Smith, 1985). The results show that certain programmes promote greater improvement in certain types of performance, but that none is sufficiently general in its impact for it to be possible to consider it better than the others. Programmes which are highly structured around academic tasks do not produce better general results than the others, but specifically promote the learning of letters, numbers and geometrical forms. The **High/Scope** programme, which is based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development, promoting learning through action, has a particular influence on the scores obtained in the Stanford-Binet intelligence tests.

It would, however, be wrong to jump to the conclusion that the various types of programme are roughly equivalent, insofar as the study raises several methodological problems. Evaluation was strictly limited to the cognitive field, leaving aside the social and affective fields, for want of valid instruments for measurement. Furthermore, the application of one single criterion, identical for all programmes but not appropriate to the objectives of each of them individually, obscures a number of their effects. It should, however, be noted that the construction of adequate instruments of evaluation was made difficult by the fact that the programmes had vague objectives and did not always have specific criteria for defining their success. Those promoting the various programmes where therefore in favour of adopting a battery of standardised tests.

To these criticisms must be added the fact that the programmes were sometimes introduced before they were functional. In addition, the actual introduction of programmes was not always strictly in accordance with the original decisions. Differences between places operating the same programme could be more significant than those between places operating two quite different programmes.

The **Ypsilanti Preschool Curriculum Demonstration Project** compared three different programmes (a Piaget programme; the Bereiter-Engelman programme, based on language; and a traditional programme) and monitored the appropriateness of the activities provided in relation to the programmes' intentions (Weikart, 1978). The children in question came from low-income disadvantaged backgrounds. Their intelligence quotients at the beginning of the study were below average.

These children attended a pre-school education centre for two years and had regular home visits. After a year of pre-school education, the children achieved cognitive and linguistic results which were similar across all the programmes, and which were better than those of children who had not attended pre-school education. At the end of the second year, there were still gains, but they were a little less significant.

The children's gains, as measured by their intelligence quotients, were still discernible at the end of fourth grade. Transfers to special education were fewer in the case of children who had attended any one of the three programmes when compared with children who had not had the advantage of any pre-school education. This confirmed the impact of pre-school education on education in general (see chapter on effects), but it could not be concluded that any one programme was better than any other. The authors state only that the parents become more involved in educational activities when the aims of the programmes are clearly defined.

In another study, Miller *et al.* (1971) noted longer-term effects. They compared the development of children who had attended various programmes - Bereiter-Engelman, Montessori, Darcee and Head Start - with that of children who had not had any form of pre-school education. The different variables, apart from the programme itself, were monitored, the children being divided up on a random basis and the interaction time with adults being identical.

The results indicated in particular the existence of a link between the programmes' effects and the sex of the child. For example, the cognitive progress of girls was less marked than that of boys under the Montessori programme. The academic performances and the intellectual levels recorded at the end of pre-school education remained up to the eighth grade.

In Europe, a similar study, the **Barnardo's Project**, is being carried out in Ireland. The objective is to evaluate the application of the **High/Scope** programme, which provides learning situations defined on the basis of Piaget's theory of development. This is founded on the idea that children learn best from activities which they themselves initiate, decide and implement. Evaluation is comparative, the ability of the children who attended the **High/Scope** centre being measured in the second year of primary education alongside that of children who have had no pre-school experience. In addition to the effects on the children's development, the study is also examining the organisational and educational procedures used in the centre and the effort which the parents are investing in the development of their children.

Organisation of activities and management of groups

Over the last two decades, educational researchers have concentrated on research into the direct links between the characteristics of facilities (child/adult ratios, group size, space management, and equipment) and the attainments and development of the child. However, the relationship between provision and child development can be considered from another angle, by looking for intermediate variables more closely associated with the teacher's behaviour. Here, account is taken of the relationships on the one hand, between variables in the facilities and the behaviour of the educator, and on the other, between the behaviour of the educator and the development of the child. A number of studies have analysed the relationship between facilities and behaviour, but very few have looked at the relationship between the interaction of the child with the adult and the child's development.

The Oxford Pre-school Research Project (Bruner, 1980) included a number of points relevant to this context. For example, the child carried out complex actions when given material with a well-defined objective, and the means to attain the objective, and where the results enabled him to see his own progress; conversely, poorly structured activities led to less elaborate play. Between the two, symbolic play, and play with sand and water led to complex activities, but at a lower level than the first.

Furthermore, children became more involved in complex actions when they played with another child or with an adult. From the language point of view, there was very little conversation in pre-school centres. The longest conversations took place in a small, quiet place, as though conversation required intimacy. Situations where the child was confronted with less elaborate activities were conducive to related conversation. In general, the role of the adult was dominant, but organisational tasks frequently interrupted dialogue.

Another study carried out in Belgium in the context of the IEA[1] Pre-primary Project, **A Quality of Life Study**, provides information on the organisation of educational activities in small groups in schools in the French Community of Belgium (Delhaxhe, 1991). In the classes observed, the child/adult ratios ranged from 15 to more than 25 children to one adult. The study describes the activities of the children during the period spent in the nursery school.

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[1] IEA: The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

On average, out of the total sample observed, educational activities occupied 54% of the educational time available. During such activities, the children were often fairly passive; they listened to the adult for 18% of the time, they were completely inactive for the same proportion of the time, and they were waiting for their parents or an adult for 5% of the time. They took part in a conversation for 13% of the time, they drew for 8%, and handled objects for 9%. This descriptive study[2] raises questions about the quality of the educational activity and, in particular, the amount of time spent waiting and listening, considering how much young children learn through contact with, and exploring, their surroundings.

Although in some Belgian nursery classes, the teachers provide identical activities for all the children at the same time (whole-class organisation), others offer several activities at the same time, based on small groups (workshop organisation). The children in the latter classes, especially when arranged in small groups, engaged more often in verbal interactions about the task in hand. They spent less time listening to the adult (5%), and less time waiting (1.4%), and they were actively involved for over 44% of the time.

In France, a study has established that language skills are a necessary, although not the only, requirement for subsequent success at school. The ability to pay attention and to follow the class rhythm is also needed (Florin, 1991). This study, at an experimental stage, showed the importance of the teacher's behaviour for the child's language development. Behaviour which encourages participation in discussions while respecting the turn of others to speak, and the increase in feedback for children who do not speak much, influences conversation. It permits a significant increase in the contributions of the latter, as compared with those of the good or average speakers.

These processes depend to a large extent on class organisation. Change in teaching behaviour is associated with another change, that from whole class teaching (25 children) to small group teaching. When, after this experimental stage, the teacher returns to whole class teaching, the communication networks resume their original form, with the "good speakers" dominating, to the detriment of the others.

In Sweden, in a study published in 1982, Ekholm, Ekholm and Hedin compared twelve centres with different teaching methods. They noted that the children cooperated more readily and had fewer conflicts in centres where the staff used a child-centred teaching approach with long-term objectives (Palmerus, 1992).

In the United States, Holloway and Reichhart-Erickson (1988) studied the relationship between adult/child interactions, the physical environment, and the social skills of the children. The quality of the interactions was evaluated from the point of view of frequency, warmth, encouraging independence, expressing feelings, positive evaluation, and the adaptation of expectations to the development of the children.

The results showed that the higher the quality of the interactions, the more the responses of the children were socially acceptable (discussion, negotiation, concession) in situations where they had to resolve a problem of social conflict presented by the investigator. The arrangement of space so that the children could occupy themselves individually, or in small or larger groups, and the variety of accessible material adapted to the ages of the children, determined socially acceptable behaviour. Other variables were taken into account. High pupil-teacher ratios were correlated with a reduction in individual play and more watching of other children. A large number of children led to more "anti-social" behaviour (resorting to force).

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[2] The preliminary results of the international study undertaken by the IEA indicates that similar observations have been made in several countries.

Conclusions

The studies presented above confirm the beneficial effect of pre-school education on socially deprived children, whatever programme was followed. **The conditions of operation appear much more important than the characteristics of the programme**. For Weikart *et al.* (1978), the principal question of pre-school education is therefore not so much to determine which programme to use as to know how to manage it in order to obtain positive results. Similarly, several authors insist that more importance should be attached to the quality of implementation of programmes.

Nonetheless, looking beyond the research results, it is necessary to discuss the type of activities offered to children. Some programmes stress academic activities, training the children in a number of specific skills. Others offer less formal activities, taking into account the development of the child. Which approach is to be preferred? The methods of assessment used in most of the American studies do not provide a definitive answer to this question. But the fact that there are no differences in the effects of the various programmes, in terms of success at school and academic aptitude, is in itself, interesting. It makes it possible, in view of more psychological considerations, to opt for activities which respect the child's own development and which are motivating, rather than to focus on training in academic skills, which could be premature. Finally, it seems to be easier to integrate basic learning relevant to the child's life, such as social skills, independence and self-confidence, into a programme based on child development.

Closer analysis of the interactive processes between the child and the person in charge shows that it is possible, through appropriate behaviour, to improve children's verbal interaction, a skill which partly conditions success at school. Children's social skills can also be developed through adult behaviour directed at the management of conflict through discussion, at independence and at cooperation.

Furthermore, the social organisation of activities (the establishment of small groups in nursery classes with particularly high staffing ratios) and the choice of activities provided (structured material) are also means to increasing and enriching the children's activity and thereby promoting learning. The variety of the material available, which should be accessible and adapted to the children, and the opportunity for them to occupy themselves individually or in small or larger groups can both contribute to the development of social skills. It should also be mentioned here that there is probably a connection between systems which allow the children a choice of activity and the development of independence and of cooperative behaviour. Choices inevitably lead to social conflicts. The search for a solution supervised by the adult promotes the child's social development, which does not happen in situations where the adult dominates.

All these conditions, which determine the development of the social and language skills which are so important for success at school, depend very largely on the adult in charge. This raises the question of staff qualifications and therefore of training.

3. The educational team: The role of training and the importance of stability

The Member States of the European Union present a wide range of training systems for adults responsible for young children. There are, in particular, differences in the proportion of time devoted to classroom teaching practice, which varies from 16% to 62% of training time according to the country concerned (Pascal and Bertram, 1993). Some favour university graduates, others trained "educators". There are, however, hardly any European studies evaluating the impact of these different patterns of training on children's development and the quality of education.

The effects on social and language development

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Monograph analyses the results of several studies devoted to the impact of the quality of provision on the cognitive, language and/or social development of children between the ages of 2 or 3 years and 5 years (Clarke-Stewart, 1982). This study examined the impact of variables such as the experience of the educator, the stability of the team, and the training of the educator. Certain inconsistencies between studies are explained and some opinions expressed.

For example, a connection is established between the experience of the adult and the social development of the child in a study carried out in Pennsylvania, but there is no such connection in another study carried out in Bermuda. However, there are considerable differences in the number of years of experience covered in these studies: from 2 to 14 years for the former, and from 11 to 25 years for the latter. For Clarke-Stewart, the relationship may not be linear, and the optimum level of experience may be between 10 and 15 years.

The stability of the educational team appears to be of advantage to the child's development, from both the social and intellectual points of view. However, the links are not always statistically significant. In one of the studies, although stability is linked to better social adjustment, it is also linked to relatively low scores in measurements of intellectual development.

There is greater consistency across the studies as regards the effects of the adult's training, a link being found between the training of the staff and the children's intellectual and language development. However, Clarke-Stewart reported that in the Chicago study, a distinction could be made between staff with relatively formal training and those who had a high level of education. Children looked after by the latter showed better social development, possibly because the former attached more importance to academic learning, to the detriment of social skills.

In Europe, in a study carried out in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, results were obtained which bring out the importance of stability of staffing (Pierrehumbert, 1992). Initially, this study examined the effect of non-parental childcare on the development of children at 18 months, age 2 and then age 5. The children who had received a high level of non-parental childcare had an intelligence quotient at age 5 which was lower than that of the others. As regards their social and emotional development, they did not appear to have greater emotional difficulties or problems than the others. They reacted, however, somewhat differently, in being both hyper-active and more withdrawn during social contacts. The overall result was therefore fairly negative.

Pierrehumbert then compared his results with Andersson's for Sweden (see above) and noted the contradiction between the conclusions of the two studies. He attributed this difference to the very much better quality of provision in Sweden and drew attention in particular to the presence of major changes in the educational environment of some of the Swiss children (change of childcare centre or family). Analysis of the data confirms the hypothesis that the element of "discontinuity of care provider" had a greater influence on the children's development at age 2 than the actual type of childcare. The author concluded that continuity of social and educational supervision of very young children was important, irrespective of the type of provision.

A study carried out in Sweden found that supervision of the staff in charge of children was important. Palmerus (1990) compared the services offered by childcare centres and placement families. A number of differences emerged, in particular as regards the proportion of educational activities, which was higher in the centres. Nonetheless, the comparison indicated that there were more similarities than differences as regards the other factors. Palmerus explained this similarity by the fact that the childminders were organised in small groups which met every week, and they were supervised by specialist educators. They were also encouraged to comply with the instructions set out in the **Preschool Educational Program** published at national level.

Conclusions

In general, the studies tend to demonstrate the positive effect that the training and supervision of staff responsible for young children can have on interactions, educational activities and social and intellectual development. The conclusions drawn by Clarke-Stewart also lead to the belief that the content of training determines the type of learning. Staff may tend more towards social or cognitive or even school learning, [illegible]d this affects the development of the child.

There would appear to be a need at the present time for an increase in investment in research into the effects of quality of provision and of different types of initial training (duration; type of training - general or specifically devoted to early childhood; the importance of practical placements). The conditions and the duration of supervision of staff in service should also be examined.

The stability of the educational team would appear to be an aspect to be taken into consideration, although it does not always guarantee better development. It probably serves as an indicator of the working conditions of staff. The greater the material and psychological constraints, and the more unsatisfactory the salary conditions, the greater the staff turnover.

4. Involvement of the family in educational activities

The effects of pre-school education on the child's success at school depend to a large extent on its impact on the family, as already mentioned in the first chapter of this document. This impact produces, more specifically, a change in the perception of the child's potential, with the result that there is an increase in the family's expectations and support.

Over and above motivation and aspirations, the family's educational skills play a role in the child's development. A study carried out in Norway by Hartmann (1991) tested the effects of the experience of outside provision and the education received from the mother on the child's learning ability. The study was based on two samples: one consisted of mother-child dyads who used pre-school provision on a full-time basis for two years, while the other consisted of mother-child dyads who did not use it. The mothers and children were met some months before the child's entry to the first year of primary school to assess the educational skills of the mother (to inform, anticipate, show an alternative, assess the child's understanding, offer emotional support, etc.). The child's readiness for learning, in terms of mastery of rules, decision-making and planning, or inadequate expression of interest, passivity, etc., was also assessed.

The results showed the positive effects of the mother's teaching strategies on the child's aptitude for learning. The greater the mother's ability to put herself on the child's level, the greater the child's capacity to learn, whether or not the child attended a pre-school centre. Furthermore, pre-school experience improved the child's learning abilities, whatever the mother's level of skills. The children covered by this study were 7 years old at the time of the interview. A follow-up is envisaged.

In Spain, the ***Contexto Infancia en la Zona Franca de Barcelona*** project has sought to develop a policy for early childhood based on a series of actions carried out in one area of Barcelona. In this project, a descriptive study of the educational contexts (family and school) has provided insight into the quality of the environment and of the activities provided, and of the educational values of the parents and teachers. The other aspects of the project aimed to provide in-service training for teachers, and to develop pre-school facilities different from the traditional services, with involvement of the parents. The main thesis of the project coordinators is that continuity in the two educational areas, home and school, is most important for children's development.

The conclusions of their research (Bassedas, Vila, 1992) show that the activities and the concept of the child are close in both educational contexts when the children are young (0 - 3 years), but that they diverge as the children get older. Important differences between children then start to emerge.

For some children, both contexts contribute towards their development. For others, one of the contexts is dominant. Sometimes it is the family which helps the child to make progress, sometimes it is the school. It has been noted that educational stimulation of high quality at home promotes success at school, whereas a major gap between family and school can reduce the importance of school learning and contribute to school failure.

These studies confirm the extent of the role which parents' educational attitudes and skills play in their children's development and in their success at school.

Family-centred intervention projects

A project has been launched in Ireland to develop a pre-school service involving parents (Hayes and McCarthy, 1992). This project concerns deprived children in a Dublin suburb. The model for the scheme is based on the **High/Scope** programme. It promotes learning through action with, in addition, particular stress on language development. One parent from each family is asked to come and work in the centre for one day every three weeks. Meetings are also held to help the parents develop other skills relating to family management.

Evaluation of the project covers the children's development from the point of view of language, cognitive skills, physical aptitudes and socialisation. It also takes account of the parents' development, their attitude to their child's learning and their involvement in its development. It emerged from a preliminary analysis that evaluation of the parents using formal measures (structured interview, questionnaire, etc.) is a delicate matter and that they were very reluctant to divulge some of the information requested in the questionnaires. The authors therefore decided to use a more informal type of questioning. There will be an evaluation of the long-term effects of the project.

Another project is being developed in the south of Spain (***Proyecto Granada***) with a population which includes a Gypsy community (Rodriguez, 1992). The aim is to admit the children along with their parents, who will take part in the training, cultural and educational initiatives by interacting and comparing their experiences. The first positive results are, amongst others, that the children become integrated more easily in the schools (*colegios*) and that the mothers receive training from a cultural development and family training viewpoint. This project is one of a series of programmes developed in the rural areas of Andalusia.

A study in England evaluated the impact of a pre-school development project using home visits (Hirst and Hannon, 1990). It describes the impact of the procedure on cognitive, social and emotional progress and language. At the outset, the parents had relatively little useful educational experience, with a resultant negative attitude to school. They generally also had little awareness of their educational role.

In this project, teachers regularly visited children and parents in socially and economically deprived families. They introduced activities such as story-telling, singing, the discovery together of picture books, etc. Several families have continued the activities with their child, responding with interest to the possibility of going to the local library and of joining adult education groups. The teachers undertaking these home visits on the other hand returned with a different view of the children's situation, both more positive as regards their family relationships and better informed as regards their actual home conditions. The authors stress that this home education service is expensive, but that it is the only way of obtaining such effects on the family environment.

In the Netherlands, a home intervention project has been in operation for several years, using not only teachers but also mothers in the community involved in the scheme. This is based on a list of structured activities, designed to prepare the child for its future education at school. After a training session, local mothers present this list to the families during weekly visits so that these parents can learn how to repeat the activities with their children. The parents also meet regularly in small discussion groups.

A recent study has assessed the impact of such intervention on the intelligence, language skills and behaviour of the children in class (Vedder and Eldering, 1992). Overall, the results are mixed. Only children of Moroccan origin who took part in the programme had better language skills than Moroccan children who had not taken part in the programme. For the other measurements, there was no observable effect. These results do not, however, imply that the programme is not useful.

Monitoring of mothers' participation rates in the programme enables the correlation between the regularity of their participation and the cognitive development of the child to be calculated. This correlation is significantly positive. In the opinion of the authors, an increase in participation must result in an increase in the effects. They therefore advocate improving the conditions of implementation of the programme. One of their conclusions is that the programme of activities was too rigid and that it was difficult to regulate according to the children's learning. Furthermore, work with relatively uneducated, sometimes illiterate, mothers reduced the possibility of a more flexible approach.

Conclusions

There are a number of intervention projects in operation in Europe. Some involve attendance at a pre-school centre by children accompanied by their parents. Others are based on visits to families, either by a professional or by other local mothers. All these arrangements have their advantages and disadvantages. The differences in the situations and the absence of comparative evaluation mean that it is difficult at present to determine whether one is better than another. The fact that these projects are tied to specific cultural contexts means that it is practically impossible to make any generalisations.

It can, however, be noted that the high rate of participation by families in the intervention partly explains the effects observed in programmes focused solely on parents. This participation clearly depends on living conditions, and also on the level of the parents' awareness of their role in the education of their children.

There is currently little certainty as to the effects of actions involving parents in culturally deprived contexts. As was shown in the large-scale study described in the first part of this paper (White, Taylor and Moss, 1992), an instrumental type of action that introduces parents to specific activities to be developed at home offers hardly any benefits beyond these provided by good pre-school education. The various European attempts at intervention in the family have yielded more qualitative results, but from which it is hard to generalise. Nonetheless, these actions give an idea of the importance of parents' real involvement in the education of their children, which undoubtedly extends beyond carrying out specific activities home.

Again, Schweinhart and Weikart (1980) showed that changing the way in which deprived families regard their children, and consequently their aspirations for them, is a key factor in the long-term effect produced by pre-school education. A hypothesis could thus be formulated to the effect that, in as far as programmes of intervention in the family affect the perception that parents have of their children, they are effective.

C. CONCLUSIONS

By way of summary of this review of the scientific studies carried out into the role of pre-school education and its beneficial effects, a series of questions are set out below, along with some of the replies provided by the research.

Does pre-school education have any positive effects on the child's ability and career at school?

Undoubtedly, for children from very deprived socio-economic backgrounds. Not only do they show intellectual progress, they also acquire positive attitudes and the motivation to make a real effort to do well at school. This is translated into better results at school, reduced rates of repeating of the year, and fewer transfers to special education.

It should, however, be noted that pre-school education has an indirect influence on success at school. It improves the child's intellectual skills in the short term and, consequently, changes the perceptions of others as to the child's potential. In return, these perceptions lead parents and educators to support the child's development and career at school.

In more general terms, pre-school education has a positive effect on children's intellectual and social skills, independent of their background, when centres really provide quality, in terms of both physical surroundings and adult/child interactions.

The duration of attendance at pre-school education plays a role which is not unimportant. However, this parameter may be a reflection of another dimension, namely the importance of family attitudes to education. To be effective, any extension of the duration of pre-school education would no doubt have to be accompanied by the family's support for the proposed educational action.

Does pre-school education have positive effects on the social integration of the adolescent and the adult?

Undoubtedly, for children from very deprived socio-economic backgrounds in the USA, for whom a reduction in delinquent behaviour was noted, as well as a greater rate of staying on in education. This effect on social integration can be explained no doubt by successful educational integration with less repeating of years, lower drop-out rates and a greater desire to be integrated into society.

Are some educational models more effective than others?

There are no clear differences between educational models as regards the effects in the case of children from deprived backgrounds. The important thing is the conditions under which action is implemented rather than the model, that is to say, the physical environment, size of the groups, stability of the teaching team and the quality of the interactions between the adult and the children.

Do conditions such as the size of groups, the ratios of children to adults and the stability of the teaching team have an effect on development?

High staffing ratios indirectly promote teaching and learning behaviour which have an effect on children's development. However, a change in this ratio alone does not guarantee a change in development. It must be accompanied by cooperation between the adults responsible and by quality educational action. Nor does it constitute the only variable explaining the situation.

The ideal staffing standards vary from one country to another - 15 children to 3 adults in Sweden or 25 children to 2 adults in the United States. In nursery schools, it is not unusual to see ratios of 25 children to one adult. Given the increase in the numbers of two-year-olds attending nursery schools, care must be given to the definition of staffing ratios for this age group. This is the age when children learn to speak, and the development of language is achieved through interaction with other children and with the adult. More than ever, the establishment of small groups conducive to such interaction within the class is necessary.

Group size is also important. Several authors regard about 25 children as the maximum. This somewhat calls into question practices such as open organisation and vertical grouping of children[3], favoured in some countries. Furthermore, classes with over 25 children should *ipso facto* have two adults in charge.

The **stability of the educational team** appears to be another important factor. It seems to exercise a positive role on the development of the children. In practice, it must be difficult to reconcile staff investment in the physical environment with frequent changes in their place of work.

Does the training and supervision of staff influence children's development?

The development of children depends on *inter alia* adult behaviour in regard to them (organisation, management of activities, interaction with the children). It would therefore appear that both initial and in-service training and the supervision of the staff responsible for young children are elements to be taken into consideration. Supervision should be taken to mean regular visits (weekly or fortnightly) to the classes or centres by an adviser concerned with assisting staff in relation to their educational practice. By alternating between discussion and observation, this adviser could gradually help staff members to resolve problems of organisation and activity planning, and also to develop new styles of teaching. Although this hypothesis still needs to be tested in practice, we consider that supervision of this kind is an element even more important than the type of educational programme itself in determining the success of pre-school intervention.

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[3] This involves grouping together several nursery classes for occasional activities, which can lead to groups of 50 or even 60 children. Slavin (1987) considers it important for a child to be a member of a stable group which becomes his reference group. From this perspective, presented here for the primary school level but certainly also applicable to nursery classes, it would seem important to restrict the practice of such open organisation.

What should the adult's role be?

There are three interdependent areas of adult behaviour which have an impact on children's development.

- The **organisation of the class** in groups in different areas, allowing the children to do things individually or in small or larger groups. This form of organisation has positive effects on social development (independence, cooperation, settling of social conflicts) and language.

- The **introduction of different types of material**, accessible and appropriate to the children, with suggestions for activities structured around this material. This enables the children to become involved in elaborate play, while also developing their social skills.

- The **quality of the adult/child interactions** both in relation to management of social behaviour (stimulating discussion and self-expression, encouragement of independence, etc.) and from the point of view of language (management of speaking time and encouragement for children who do not talk much).

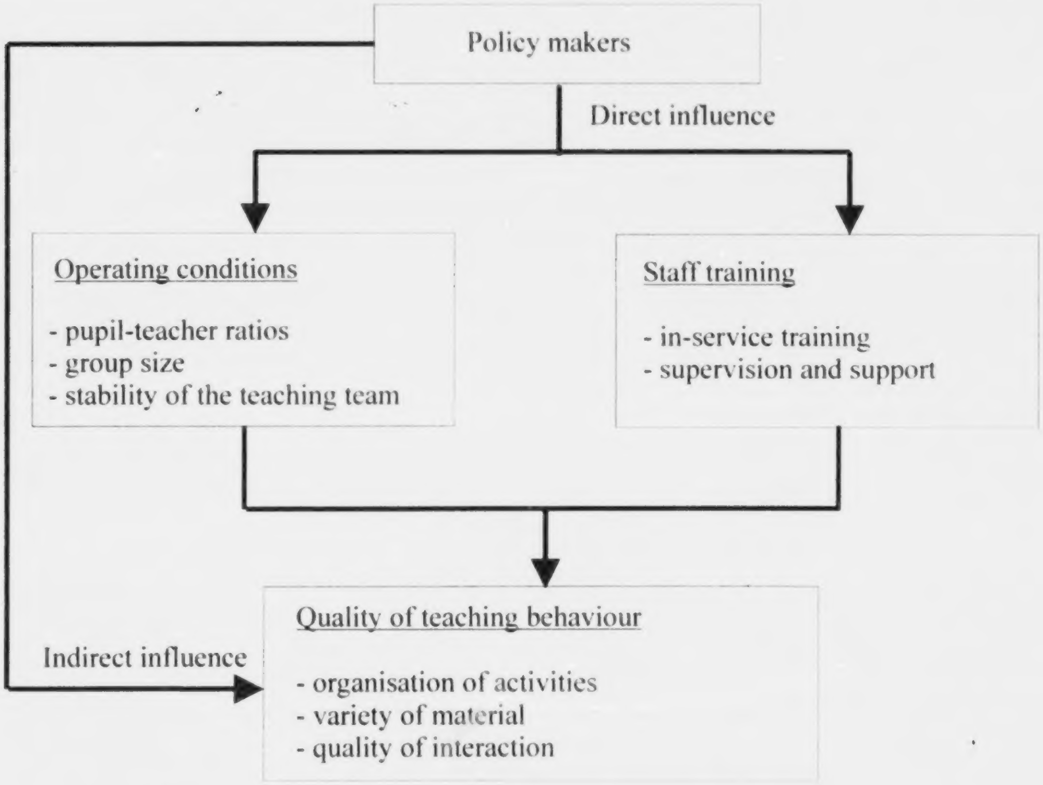
Should families be actively involved in education and how can their participation be promoted?

Projects aimed at involving parents from deprived backgrounds in the education of their children are many and varied. At present, research lacks solid arguments in support of parental involvement and for the definition of methods of effective action. It would only appear that an instrumental type of intervention aimed at equipping parents with a set of specific activities to carry out at home is more relevant to handicapped children than to children from deprived backgrounds, particularly when the latter also have the benefit of good pre-school education.

Other forms of parent involvement would appear to benefit deprived children, including emotional support, the development of satisfactory parent/child relationships, help in using services available locally (for instance welfare, family advice and nutritional services), but these kinds of services rarely feature in the programmes which have been studied.

* * *

Of these criteria of quality, a number will interest policy makers, to the extent that they come within their ambit. These include on the one hand, operating conditions - favourable staffing ratios, smaller groups for the youngest children in particular, and stability of the teaching team, which can contribute to improving the quality of provision. On the other hand, important decisions could be taken in relation to staff, as regards both the initial and in-service training structures and also the introduction of some form of supervision and support. Improvements in these areas would undoubtedly have a positive effect on the teaching behaviour of the staff in their organisation of activities, the introduction of more varied material, and the development of quality interactions.


Policy makers
Direct influence
Operating conditions
- pupil-teacher ratios
- group size
- stability of the teaching team
Staff training
- in-service training
- supervision and support
Quality of teaching behaviour
- organisation of activities
- variety of material
- quality of interaction
Indirect influence

In conclusion, it should probably be mentioned that the effects of pre-school education on the child's future education are linked to the total educational input throughout the child's life. At an early stage, the types of care provided for very young children certainly influence their development. Later on, the results depend on the experiences provided in primary education. It is also important to define and promote quality in education at this stage. The expectations raised by the promotion of pre-school education will then have every chance of being fulfilled.

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PART II

EARLY YEARS PROVISION IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Compared with the provision in former times of what were essentially places of safety for the children of the industrial working classes, today's services for young children offer an interesting combination of childminding, socialisation and education for all children. Every society has, of course, its individual educational specialities, the product of a complex heritage of local cultural and social traditions. In some Member States, the principal role of pre-school education is the socialisation and intellectual stimulation of children, but it has no formal teaching function. In others, in addition to these objectives, importance is also attached to more formal learning to introduce children to the routine of school. Nowadays, however, the differences between these concepts are becoming less pronounced, the most common model tending undoubtedly to be one which seeks to promote the social, emotional and cognitive development of young children through play and activities appropriate to their ages in different types of provision under a variety of names such as *école maternelle*, nursery school, *Kindergarten*, *basisonderwijs*, *nypiagogia*, *Spillschoul*, or *educación infantil*.

The information presented in this document relates in the main to education-oriented establishments catering for children between the ages of 2 or 3 years and the start of compulsory primary education. Day nurseries, provided by either public authorities or the private sector, and the private childminding still found for children in this age group in some Member States are therefore only touched upon in this study.

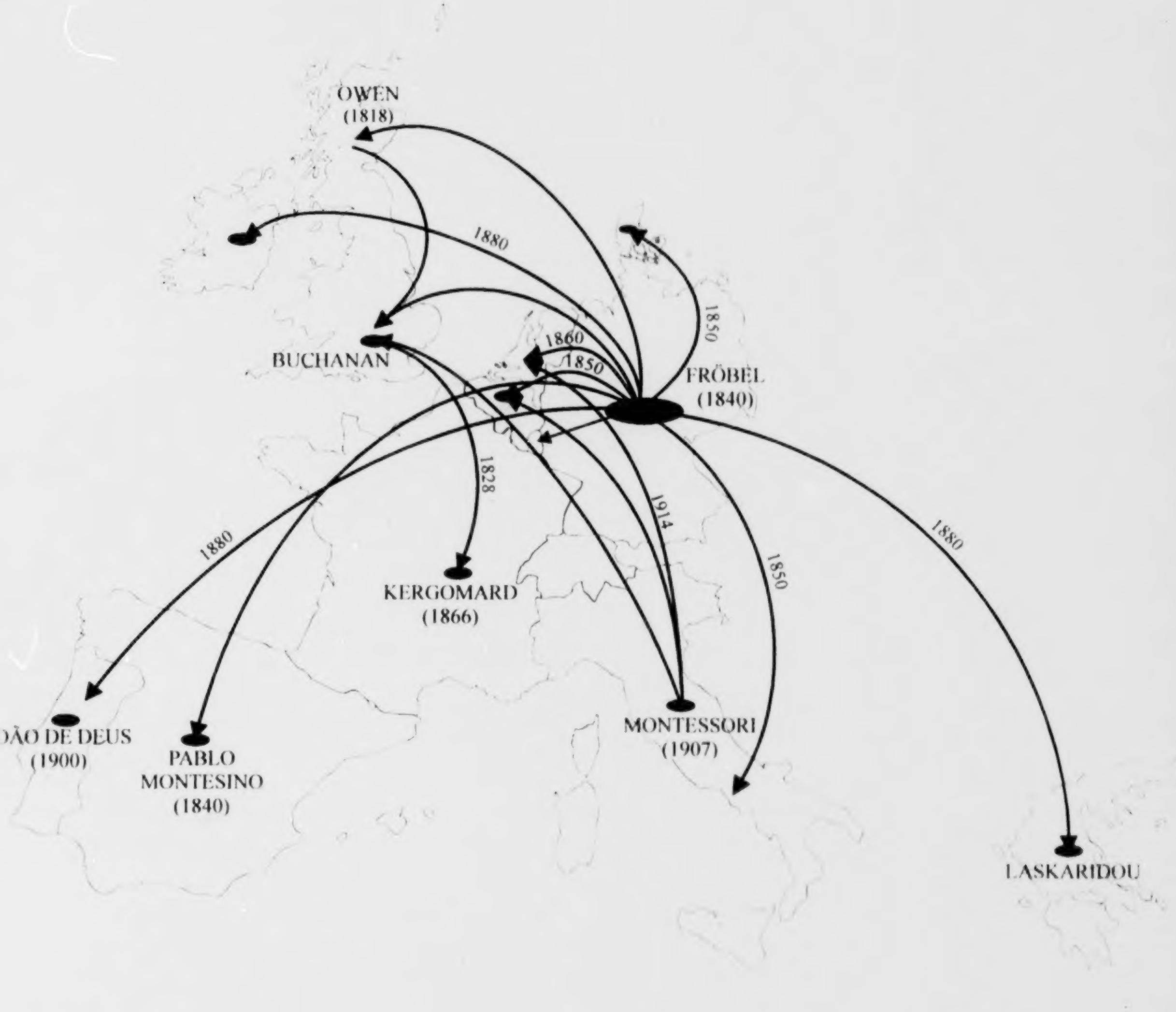
1. Historical overview

There is no longer any comparison between the objectives set for the first childcare institutions for young children, which were founded throughout Europe towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, and those pursued today by the services which have developed in most western countries.

The first institutions appeared generally at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in the context of the industrial revolution. They were provided as a result of private initiative and were only for the children of the working classes, to ensure that these children were cared for whilst their mothers worked in the factories. The main objective was to supervise the children, and at the same time to instil into them some principles of hygiene and morals. These children's centres were often known as "refuges" (*salles d'asile*). In Greece the first such institutions were later in appearing, only going back to the end of the nineteenth century. Until then, families carried the entire responsibility for the care and education of their children. Over a short space of time, a number of individuals were to influence the organisation of these pre-school institutions by developing educational models and introducing training for the adults who worked with young children. Those who were particularly influential in this field were Friedrich Froebel, throughout most of Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, Robert Owen in the United Kingdom, and Maria Montessori in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century. Froebel's influence is found both in Member States which have opted for the early introduction of young children to the school system as such

(Belgium, Spain, Greece, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) and in those which have opted for provision outside the framework of the school system. In the latter, the name which Froebel introduced for them - *Kindergarten,* literally, "children's garden" - has generally been retained, either in the original form or in translation (Germany, Denmark, Portugal).

INFLUENCE OF THE EDUCATIONISTS ON PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION MODELS DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY


OWEN
(1818)
1880
1850
1860
1850
BUCHANAN
FRÖBEL
(1840)
1828
1914
1880
1850
1880
KERGOMARD
(1866)
JOÃO DE DEUS
(1900)
PABLO
MONTESINO
(1840)
MONTESSORI
(1907)
LASKARIDOU

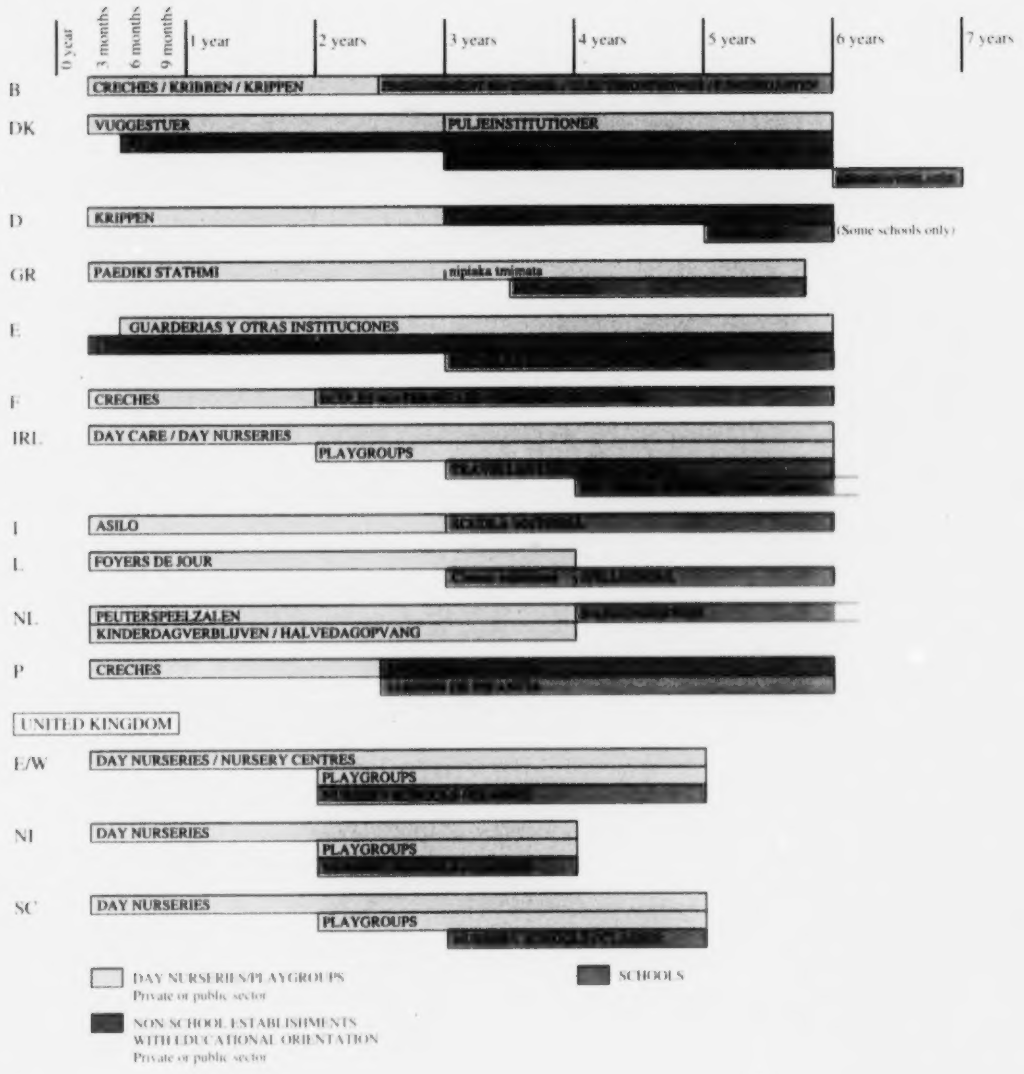
In most Member States of the European Union, the public authorities did not remain insensitive to these "cradles" of educational potential for long. The earliest specific legislation on pre-school education was introduced in France and in Spain towards the middle of the nineteenth century. In most Member States, legislation dates from the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century, although in some countries it does not appear until the mid-twentieth century. In Ireland, where children are admitted to "infant classes" in the National Schools from 4 years of age, the first specific statutory reference to a "pre-school child" came in 1991.

YEARS	FIRST SPECIFIC LEGISLATION IN RELATION TO PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION
1810 1820	
1820 1830	
1830 1840	FRANCE (1837)
1840 1850	
1850 1860	SPAIN (1857)
1860 1870	
1870 1880	LUXEMBOURG, BELGIUM (1880)
1880 1890	
1890 1900	GREECE (1895)
1900 1910	PORTUGAL (repealed around 1930)
1910 1920	DENMARK (1919)
1920 1930	GERMANY (1922), ITALY (1923)
1930 1940	
1940 1950	UNITED KINGDOM (1944-1947)
1950 1960	NETHERLANDS (1956)
1960 1970	
1970 1980	PORTUGAL (new legislation 1973)
1980 1990	
1990 2000	IRELAND (1991)

2. A wide range of institutions

There is a wide and varied range of institutions which young children in Europe can attend before entering primary school. These are represented in the following schema, with the name of each in the original language. The institutions may be public or private, and they may come under the authorities responsible for education and the school system or other government departments, such as social services or health. In constructing the schema below, the criterion adopted for purposes of classification is the qualifications of the staff recruited. In establishments coming under the school systems, staff responsible for children's education always have specialised diplomas in education. However, in the other non-school institutions - generally playgroups or day nurseries - the staff are not necessarily qualified in education. There are, however, exceptions, like the *Kindergärten* in Germany, the *børnehaver* in Denmark and the *jardins de infância* in Portugal, and these are therefore classified here as establishments "with educational orientation".

Schema of pre-school provision, 1993/94



In only two countries, Belgium and France, does the school constitute the sole educational establishment for children from the age of 2 years. This single form of provision is also found in Italy, for children from the age of 3, and in Luxembourg and the Netherlands for those from the age of 4. Conversely, in Denmark and Germany, attendance at school is not possible until the age of 5, or even 6 in a majority of the *Länder*. In the other Member States, there are many types of pre-school provision which children may attend up to the point of entry to compulsory primary education. Northern Ireland is a special case, since compulsory primary education there starts at age 4. In Luxembourg, attendance at *Spillschoul* is compulsory from the age of 4.

Generally speaking, the age of entry to nursery schools is set at 3 or 4 years of age. The most common forms of provision for children between 3 and 6 years who do not attend a nursery school are *Kindergarten*-type establishments (Germany, Denmark, Portugal), day nurseries or childcare centres (Denmark, Spain, Greece, Ireland, United Kingdom) and playgroups (Ireland, United Kingdom).

The latter establishments may be run by public authorities, generally the social services and/or health departments, or by private bodies. When these institutions are in the public sector, or are publicly recognised and grant-aided, they are subject to inspection to ensure that they meet the child welfare and safety standards. Staff recruited to them are generally qualified, at least in nursery nursing.

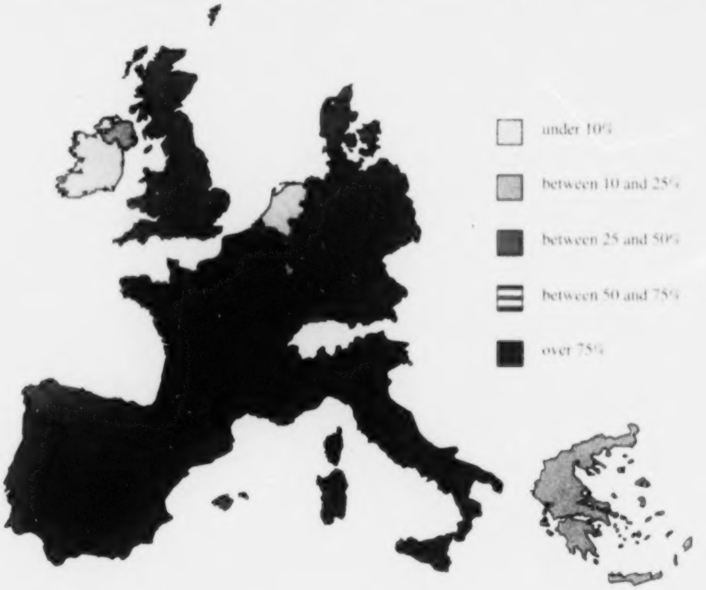
Some Member States have alternative forms of provision to compensate for the absence of nursery schools in certain sparsely-populated or deprived areas, to ensure that as many children as possible can have the benefit of pre-school education. The most common forms are visiting teacher and home educational activity schemes. This is particularly the case in Portugal, Spain and France. In Ireland home teaching is provided for visually impaired and hard-of-hearing children.

3. Attendance rates

The importance attached to the socialisation and education of young children, and the arrangements made nowadays to provide pre-school education for the greatest possible number of them, are reflected in the high attendance rates in most countries. This suggests that the link between the fact of mothers going out to work and the attendance of children between 3 and 6 years of age at pre-school provision is increasingly tenuous.

Families' demands for childcare facilities for young children are increasing almost everywhere. Thus, although, under most education systems, attendance at any sort of education programme is optional before the age of 5 years, it is the case that, at the age of 4, attendance at some form of educational provision has become fairly general, involving more than 75% of children, except in Greece, Ireland and Portugal, where the rates for this age group barely exceed 50%.

Attendance at education-oriented provision* at 3 years of age, 1991/92

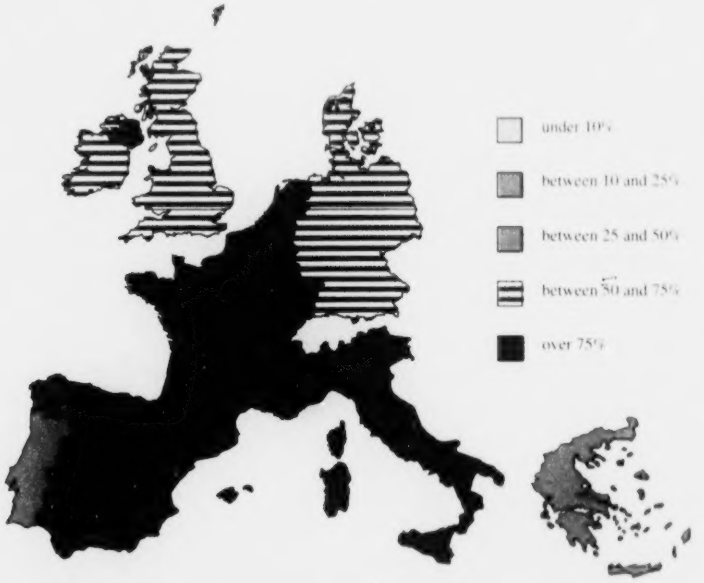

under 10%
between 10 and 25%
between 25 and 50%
between 50 and 75%
over 75%

* (excluding *crèches/garderies*/day nurseries/playgroups)

Source: Eurydice

On the other hand, for the youngest age group, there are considerable divergences between Member States. Thus, in 1991/92, the highest attendance rates (between 88% and 97%) for 3-year-olds were to be found in the three Member States where schools represent the single form of provision: Belgium, France and Italy. In Denmark and Germany, about half of all 3-year-olds are enrolled in non-school educational establishments. Amongst the other Member States where there is a variety of forms of provision, attendance at a purely educational establishment is lower for this age group (Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom) and even lower in Ireland, Greece, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

Attendance at education-oriented provision* at 4 years of age, 1991/92


under 10%
between 10 and 25%
between 25 and 50%
between 50 and 75%
over 75%

* (excluding *crèches/garderies*/day nurseries/playgroups)

Source: Eurydice

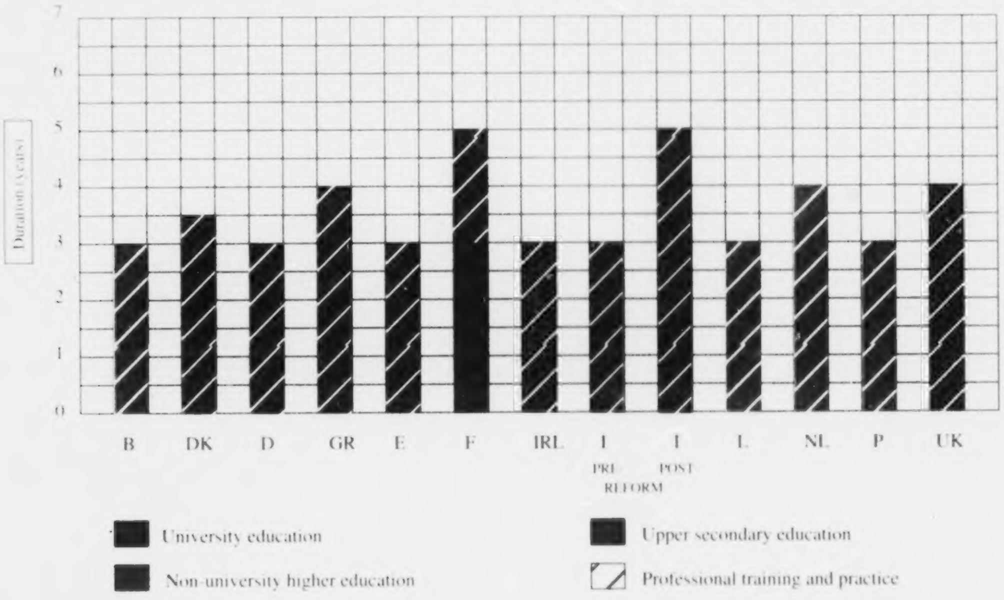
In some Member States, low attendance rates may reflect a lack of available places. Where demand exceeds supply, admissions criteria have been defined to give priority to certain children. These criteria vary both between Member States and between the public and private sectors. They may take into consideration the child's age, giving priority to the oldest, or social background, or the place of residence of the parents.

4. Training of teachers

Training of at least three years is required nowadays to obtain a qualification in nursery school teaching. The training model adopted by all Member States provides professional training for all future teachers, often with periods of practical experience throughout their basic training, except in France, where teacher training as such starts after the first three years of the university course.

In almost all Member States, applicants for nursery teacher training courses must hold a certificate of upper secondary education, except in the case of Italy (prior to the reform taking place at present) where admission is possible from the end of the lower secondary school stage, at around 14 years, and in Germany. The *Erzieher*, staff responsible in the *Kindergärten* in Germany, do not have teacher status and are trained in institutions at upper secondary level.

In half the Member States, training is now provided by universities. In the others, it takes place in non-university establishments of higher education. In France, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, pre-school teacher training is identical to that for primary school teaching. In the United Kingdom, however, most nursery teachers have followed additional specialised training in the field of infant teaching. In Ireland and the Netherlands, there is no nursery education as such; this is completely integrated into the eight years of primary education, and this explains the common training of teachers for this stage of education.



5. Staffing ratios

Some Member States have established staffing standards defining the permitted minimum and maximum numbers of children per adult in both school and non-school institutions coming under the public sector. This is the case in Belgium, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal in particular.

In general, there is an average of between 18 and 23 children in nursery classes. The average class sizes are highest in France (27 children) and in Ireland (more than 28). There may however be one or two adults in charge of the children in a class, according to the Member State, so the number of children per group provides only an approximate idea of the staffing ratio.

There is a wide variation in the staffing ratios found in nursery school classes across the Member States, and also between the private and public sectors within any one of them. These ratios are generally more favourable in the public sector. The highest pupil-teacher ratios are in Spain (30:1 in the private sector and 25:1 in the public sector), and in Ireland and Portugal (25:1). In some Member States, it is close to 20:1 (the Netherlands, in *basisonderwijs*, and Belgium) or 15:1 (in the public sector in Greece). The highest staffing ratios are currently found in Denmark, in the *Folkeskole*, and in Italy, in the public sector, with one adult to 10 children. In the United Kingdom, there are two adults to 20 children in nursery schools, except in Northern Ireland where the ratio is two adults to 25 children, and in France there are also two adults in charge of each class. In these countries, the class teacher has a teaching assistant or an assistant with a qualification in nursery nursing.

In the *Kindergarten*-type establishments, the staffing ratio is very favourable in Denmark, with 1 adult to 4.9 children in the *børnehaver*. In Germany, the ratios in the *Kindergärten* vary according to the *Länder*, and more particularly between the new and the old *Länder*, with 2 adults to 12-18 children and 2 adults to 15-25 children respectively. However, in Portugal, the ratio is 1 : 27 in the *jardins de infância* under the Ministry of Employment and Social Security.

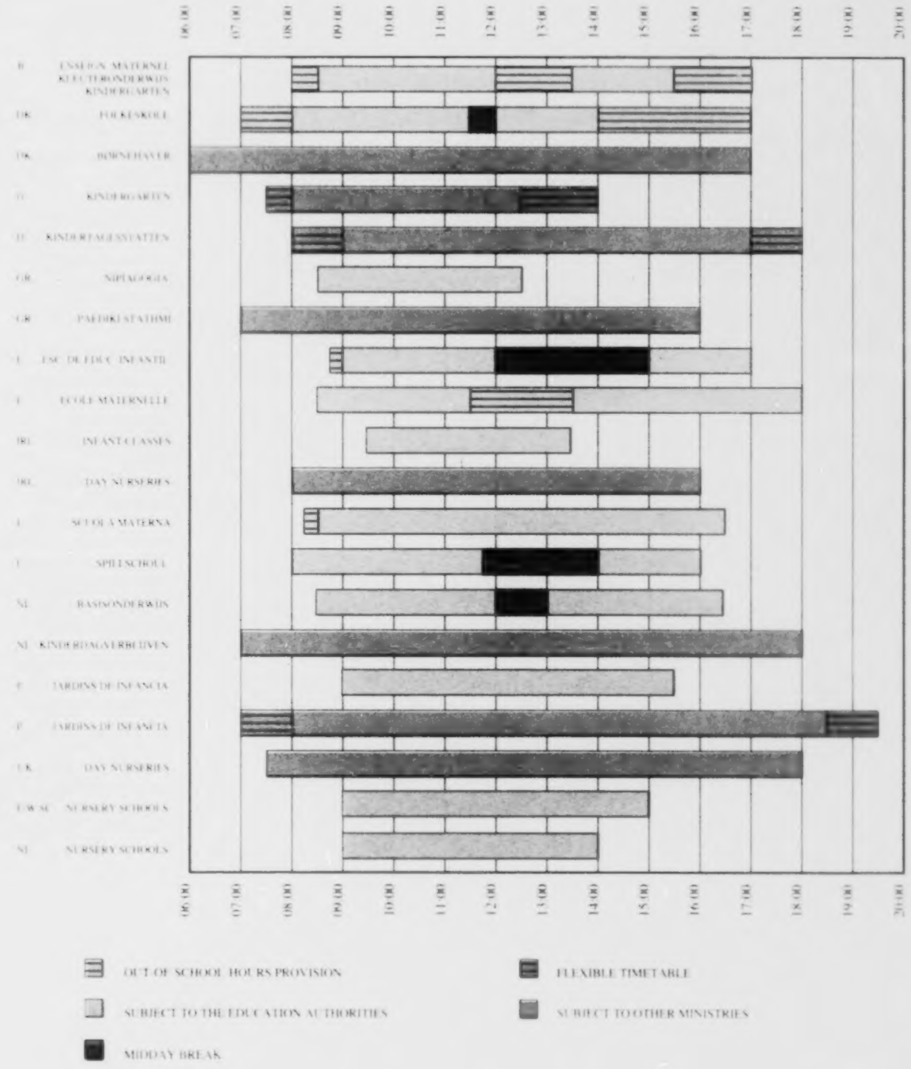
Measures are being taken at present in some countries to improve teaching staff ratios. In Ireland, demographic forecasts predict a reduction in the number of children in the coming years; however, in order to improve staffing ratios, there will be no reduction in teaching posts. In Portugal, the norms stipulate a ratio of not less than one adult per 15 children in homogeneous groups of three-year-olds in the *jardins de infância* under the Ministry of Education. This is the only country to date to have adopted separate standards for three-year-olds and for older children in establishments within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

6. Opening hours

Nursery schools generally adopt the same opening hours as primary schools and are therefore usually open between 8.30 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. in the case of full-time education (Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) or between 8.30 a.m. and 1 p.m. where it is part-time (Denmark, Greece, Ireland and Portugal).

The *Kindergärten* in Germany take children for only a few hours per day. The *børnehaver* in Denmark are open from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Other forms of provision (day nurseries, *guarderías, jardins de infância, paediki stathmi*) coming under ministries other than the Ministry of Education, indicated in blue on the following schema, provide care for children for 7 to 10 hours a day, during the parents' working time. These sometimes open very early in the morning and close around 6 or 7 p.m. They are generally open all the year.



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Organisational problems are arising from the integration of extra-curricular activities into the school systems and the opening hours of schools. In several Member States, there is increasing concern regarding provision for children outside school hours. This is particularly the case in Belgium, France and Luxembourg, where a childminding service is provided on school premises outside school hours, under the supervision of staff who may often have few qualifications. In Germany, *Kindertagesstätten* taking children for the whole day are providing an increasing number of places.

Two other countries, Denmark and the Netherlands, are trying to solve this problem by creating specialised centres outside school hours. In the Netherlands, these centres, called *buitenschoolse opvang* (literally, out-of-school care), take children from the age of 4 years, and in Denmark *fritidshjem* (leisure centres) cater for children from the age of 6 years. They are often open until 5 p.m.

7. Objectives and programmes of activities

The aims pursued in nursery education in all Member States today combine the social and cognitive development of the child. The continuum of education between family and school is emphasised in Denmark and Germany in particular, while the importance of parental involvement is expressed almost everywhere in the creation of associations of parents.

The educational transition between nursery and primary school is another topic of concern internationally. In some Member States, teachers of both levels are asked to work together; this is particularly the case in Belgium, Spain, France, Italy and Luxembourg. The objective of ensuring educational continuity was achieved in the Netherlands in 1985, with the complete integration of nursery and primary education under the name of *basisonderwijs* (basic education). In Ireland, this integration has a long tradition, going back to the nineteenth century. More formal types of learning activities are provided in some Member States to ease the transition of children to primary school, in Denmark in the *børnehaveklasser*, in Ireland in the "infant classes", in the Netherlands in *basisonderwijs* and in France, where the "big class" of the nursery school (five-year-olds) is an integral part of the first stage of primary education proper (*cycle des apprentissages fondamentaux*).

The majority of Member States have guidelines in relation to nursery school programmes of activities; however, there are no detailed legal recommendations at national level in Germany or the United Kingdom. Such guidelines are often defined at central level for the public sector, and sometimes at local level (Denmark, and Germany at *Land* level). In general, private education is free to draw up its own programmes.

In most Member States, the main areas of activities provided are the same, under a variety of names. These cover psycho-motor activities, oral expression and communication, scientific, artistic and aesthetic activities. Mathematics in some early form are included almost everywhere, except in Germany (where there are no written recommendations) and in Spain. In Portugal and the Netherlands (in *basisonderwijs*), health education is an integral part of the officially recommended programme.

TABLE OF MAIN ACTIVITIES IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Belgium - Psycho-motor activities - Plastic arts - Language - Mathematical activities - Musical activities - Scientific activities	**Denmark** - *Børnehaver*: no field defined - *Børnehaveklasser* in the *Folkeskole*: no teaching in the strict sense, but possibility of teaching certain subjects (Danish, mathematics)
Germany - Independence and socialisation - Play and other appropriate activities - Development of physical, intellectual, emotional and social skills - Introduction to organised daily routine and basic principles of hygiene	**Greece** - Psycho-motor activities (space, time) - Physical education - Artistic activities - Technology and environmental studies - Preparation for reading and number work - Social and religious activities
Spain - Personal identity and autonomy - Physical and social environment - Communication and representation	**France** - Physical education - Scientific and technical activities - Communication and oral and written expression - Artistic and aesthetic activities
Ireland - Religion - Irish - English - Mathematics - Environmental studies - Plastic arts - Music - Sport	**Italy** - Body and movement - Speech and language - Space, order, measure, things - Time - Nature - Messages - Forms and media - Self and others
Luxembourg - Physical activities - Musical activities - Artistic activities - Logic and mathematics - Language exercises - Introduction to science	**Netherlands** In *kinderopvang*: not defined In *basisonderwijs*: - Sensory and physical exercises - Dutch - Arithmetic and mathematics - English - Self-expression - Road safety - Health education
Portugal - Movement - Teaching of mother tongue - Drama and music - Plastic arts - Mathematics	**United Kingdom (England and Wales)** - Artistic activities - Social activity - Linguistic activity - Mathematics - Civics - Physical activity - Science - Technology - Religion **United Kingdom (Scotland)** - Psycho-motor activities - Physical education - Artistic activities - Preparation for reading and number work

Nursery schools are generally supervised by Ministry of Education inspectors, whose role is not only to inspect the quality of the educational work of the teachers but also to give advice to, and arrange for the in-service training of, staff. Inspectors are usually responsible for only the nursery level of education, but they may cover the primary level as well (Flemish Community of Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands).

The importance attached to the task of assessing children's progress varies from one Member State to another, but it is always an integral part of the role of the teacher or "educator", who must be attentive to the children's needs and difficulties. In some Member States, assessment is on a more formal basis. In France, for instance, a report book is kept for every pupil and a record of progress is entered in it regularly. In the Netherlands, in *basisonderwijs*, children are assessed in accordance with a programme of work issued to teachers. In Ireland, teachers assess the children using standardised tests or on the basis of exercises which they themselves prepare. In Scotland and in Northern Ireland, most teachers in local authority nursery schools establish a record of the child's progress before entry to primary school.

The decision to keep a child in pre-school education after the age for entry to primary school may be taken exceptionally in Germany, Belgium, France and Luxembourg. Such decisions are generally arrived at in cooperation with the parents and a psychologist who testifies as to the need for such action.

Those Member States which have a long school-based tradition of early education are now tending to distance themselves from a formal model of teaching at this stage, while retaining the aims of learning. Conversely, those which have long maintained pre-school education as a social complement to family education are today trying to reconcile these objectives with the intellectual development of children and their preparation for school life.

Finally, in the majority of Member States, educational provision for children between 3 and 5 years of age is seeking to respond increasingly to the educational needs of young children, and ever greater attention is being focused on the development of appropriate educational programmes. It should also be mentioned that attention is being given in a majority of the Member States to the definition of criteria for assessing the quality of the educational provision.

* * *

BELGIUM

1. Historical background and legislation

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, industrial development, which was to bring about a radical alteration in all social, economic, and family relationships, coincided with the appearance of the first day care institutions for groups of children. The first institutions founded on the initiative of ladies of good works, admitted young children of the working-classes. Children were grouped by the hundred in large rooms called *salles d'asile* (refuges). The principle aim was to keep the children off the streets and to instil in them the principles of order, morality and hygiene.

The Belgian State took an early interest in these first childminding centres. From 1842, the state granted subsidies to what were then known as *berceaux publics* (public crèches). The local authorities were invited to open schools, but the initiative remained essentially in private hands.

Pre-school education was influenced very early on by the educational ideas of Friedrich Froebel. The importance which he attached to the intellectual awakening of the young child was the most innovative element of his philosophy. He also insisted on professional status for teachers. In 1857, the first Froebel *Kindergarten* was established in Brussels. The following year, training courses for Froebel teachers were provided, with government support. Unfortunately, as a result of poor accommodation, overcrowded classes, and the lack of specialised teachers, these institutions became little different from the earlier *salles d'asile*.

It was only in 1880 that the first ministerial directives were issued to regulate the operation of pre-school establishments. In 1890, the first model curriculum drew its inspiration largely from the work of Froebel.

The directives issued in 1880 called for the establishment of one-month compulsory courses of training in the Froebel method, to ensure that the teaching staff received at least the rudiments of training. The primary education inspectors were made responsible for ensuring that the directives were implemented.

During the twentieth century, pre-school establishments have undergone a considerable change of direction. From being places providing only day care, nursery schools have developed into places for children to learn social skills, develop intellectually, and develop their personalities. Several official programmes of activities have been implemented in succession. The influence of Maria Montessori and especially of Ovide Decroly is reflected in the curricula published in 1950.

Attendance at nursery schools has progressively increased among children from all social groups. Since 1950, almost all children between the ages of 3 and 6 years have attended nursery school.

2. Types of provision

At the present time, children aged two-and-a-half may be admitted to nursery schools, which can be either public or private. Most nursery schools are attached to primary schools, only about 5% of them being physically separate and having their own and administration.

3. Administration

When education became a "Community" function in 1989, the Belgian government transferred its responsibilities for education to the three "Communities" (French, Flemish and German-speaking). Nursery schools constitute an integral part of the education system and thus come under the responsibility of the Ministry or Department of Education for each "Community".

Although the Constitution authorises the establishment of schools without restriction, the Communities make grants only to schools which meet the legal requirements, for example by adopting a structure approved by the Minister, by following a suitable curriculum, and being subject to the inspectorate. There are only a very few private, non-grant-aided schools. As a result, the majority of nursery schools are all subject to the same standards with respect to equipment, hygiene, salaries and level of teacher training, staffing, and the organisation of school time.

In each Community, there are three major networks - official Community schools; "free" (voluntary) grant-aided schools, both denominational and non-denominational; and official grant-aided schools of the Provinces and communes.

In the French Community, 38% of the pre-school establishments belong to the "free" grant-aided network, most of them being run by a Catholic organising body. About 10% of the schools are provided directly by the Community, and 52% are grant-aided schools, run by a local authority (Province or commune).

In the Flemish Community, 64% of schools belong to the "free" grant-aided network, the vast majority of them being Catholic, 16% come directly under the Community, and 20% are public grant-aided establishments.

The School Pact (*Pacte scolaire*) concluded in May 1959 guarantees the different school networks equality of funding and freedom to organise education. In theory, each organising body within the grant-aided networks enjoys complete autonomy in the administration of the schools for which it is responsible.

4. Organisation

Pre-school education is not compulsory.

Admission arrangements

Children who are at least two-and-a-half years old, and whose health and physical and psychological development are compatible with being in a group in a school environment, can be admitted to nursery school. Families have complete freedom in their choice of school.

Fees and charges

Pre-school education is free of charge. Grant-aided schools are not permitted to charge school fees. Parents may however be asked to make a financial contribution towards the cost of meals, transport, extra-curricular activities and out-of-school-hours supervision.

Opening hours and timetables

Nursery schools generally organise activities from Monday to Friday, from 8.30 or 9 a.m. to 12 noon, and from 1.30 to 3.30 p.m., except on Wednesday afternoons. There are 28 teaching periods of 50 minutes per week. Schools are open for a minimum of 182 days per year. They are closed in July and August.

Many nursery schools look after children outside school hours. They are usually open in the morning for half an hour before the beginning of school activities and provide supervision for the children at the end of the day. In towns, most children remain at school during the midday break.

Approximately half the two-and-a-half and three-year-olds attend school only in the mornings. From the age of four, they remain for the whole day.

Formation of groups

In most cases, children are placed in classes by age, with groups from two-and-a-half to 4 years of age, from 4 to 5 years, and from 5 to 6 years. In small schools, especially in rural areas, where there are not enough pupils to form several classes, children of different ages are put together in a single class. This "family" system of grouping children of mixed ages, known as *classes composites*, is becoming more common even in some larger schools.

Rather than organise the children into rigid groups, schools often choose to alternate between vertical and horizontal groupings, with classes of children of mixed ages and classes with children all of the same age.

In the French Community, teaching in stages (*cycles*) is gradually being introduced. This model is advocated on educational grounds, as it enables teachers to spread their teaching programmes over two years or more. Stages cover the age ranges from two-and-a-half to 5 years and 5 to 8 years, this second stage bridging the end of nursery education and the beginning of primary education.

Staffing

In the French Community, staffing standards provide for teaching posts to be created on the basis of one teacher for the first 19 pupils, one-and-a-half for 20 to 25 pupils, and two for 26 to 38 pupils.

On average, there are 18 pupils to a class, but the sizes of classes may vary considerably. For instance, there are sometimes more than 30 children in the classes catering for the youngest age group at the end of the Easter holidays, as families choose to wait until spring to enrol their young children.

In the Flemish Community, the pupil-teacher ratio was 21 : 1 in 1992. Teachers work either full-time or part-time.

Accommodation and equipment
Children are provided with specially organised and equipped accommodation and buildings. The most common materials include board games, toys, books, and materials for painting and for the development of psycho-motor skills. An outdoor play area is also provided. Most schools also have access to video materials and recording equipment. Half the schools are equipped with computers.

5. General objectives

While nursery education remains a completely separate level of education, along with primary education it also forms part of "basic education", called *enseignement fondamental* in the French Community and *basisonderwijs* in the Flemish Community. This structure, which covers schooling from the age of two-and-a-half to 12 years, is intended to ease the transition between the levels.

Although each organising body is free to adopt its own curriculum, the basic objectives of pre-school education may be regarded as common to all the networks - development of the child as a person, development of social skills, and cognitive and emotional development. "Free" denominational schools also include religious objectives.

In addition to developing children's independence and cooperation, pre-school education also seeks to prepare children to tackle basic learning successfully at school. The development of psycho-motor and language skills is also considered a priority. Official texts emphasise the importance of ensuring a smooth transition between the pre-school and primary levels of education.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

The Flemish Community has no official curriculum for pre-school education. Activities are organised to suit the children's needs and are based on play. Until 1991, each organising body developed its own curriculum (methods and educational projects) and submitted it to the Minister for approval. Minimum objectives are defined centrally and each authority responsible develops its own methods to attain these.

In the French Community, freedom of choice of teaching methods enables each organising body to offer its own curriculum. However, in the absence of its own specific curriculum, the organising body must refer to the official curriculum of the French Community.

The main activities to be developed are psycho-motor skills, the plastic arts, language and mathematical, musical, and scientific activities. These activities must be conceived in a functional context and carried out by means of projects appropriate to the children's interests. The method focuses on accepting and listening to the child and respecting its own pace of learning. Activities are organised in a warm and cooperative environment. The curriculum does not define specific target skills to be developed.

Some grant-aided schools in the three Communities, and also some public schools in the Flemish Community, have adopted specific teaching methods inspired by the principles of educationists such as Decroly, Freinet and Steiner, after whom such schools are usually named.

Assessment is seen as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Observation of the child's progress in carrying out activities is considered helpful to the teacher in knowing when to intervene. Assessment performs three functions: measurement (What has the child learned?), prediction (Is the child's level of development sufficient for the next stage and, in particular, for entry to the first year of primary school?), and diagnosis (What is holding back the child's development?).

On the basis of continuous observation of each child's individual development and of informal assessments, the teaching team can provide parents with an assessment of the child's behaviour and development. After consultation with the psychological, medical and social centre and the head teacher, parents can decide to extend their child's attendance at nursery school for an additional year or, conversely, to have the child begin primary school at the age of five.

7. Human resources and training

Training for teachers at pre-school level is provided in teacher training colleges (*Instituts Supérieurs de Pédagogie*). Training lasts three years. Teaching practice is organised to alternate with theoretical courses of general training, child psychology, and didactics. These courses are open to applicants with an upper secondary school leaving certificate.

One teacher generally has sole responsibility for a group of children. Support staff are also available in most schools. In the French Community, in some cases, the teacher of the class catering for the youngest age group may be assisted by a nursery nurse to ensure the children's well-being.

In the French Community, the inspectorate both advises and supervises teachers. In the Flemish Community, the inspectorate is responsible only for supervision, and educational counsellors employed by each network are responsible for providing guidance on education matters.

The medical and psychological services contribute with medical examinations and psychological follow-up of the children. In the French Community, speech therapy may also be provided, with special activities for children who need them, but this service is not grant-aided.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

By 1960, 82% of Belgian children aged 3 and 90% of children aged 4 were already attending nursery school. Currently, approximately 95% of children aged two-and-a-half and 3 years attend nursery school; by the age of 4, almost 100% of children attend, and all 5 year-olds.

9. Current issues and trends

Since 1970, a growing number of children aged two-and-a-half attend nursery school. Catering for the needs of these very young children raises the problems of adapting schools to their requirements - rates of development, timetables, sizes of groups, activities, and space.

Provision outside school hours for children in nursery schools is a major concern. In fact, many schools have organised childminding at the request of working parents. This service is not regulated and it is not the responsibility of the education system.

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DENMARK

1. Historical background and legislation

The first establishments providing care for children up to 7 years of age were set up on private initiative around 1820. These refuges, or *asyler*, as they were called, provided day care for the children of working-class families in which both parents worked outside the home. During the second half of the nineteenth century, private, fee-paying institutions for the children of the upper classes began to appear. These schools, which were part-time, were inspired by the ideas of Friedrich Froebel.

The first day nursery, for children under the age of 3, was the result of a private initiative in 1849. The number of such nurseries grew very slowly, with the result that in 1927 there were still only 26 in existence.

Under the terms of an Act of 1888, it was made illegal to look after children under the age of 14 years for reward without the prior approval of the municipal council. This requirement was retained in the child welfare legislation of 1933 and 1961.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, attempts were made to turn the *asyler* into *Kindergarten*-type institutions, and the first so-called "public" kindergartens came into being. From 1919, the government began to give grants to them as social welfare institutions. Under the social reforms of 1933, this financial assistance was extended to cover up to 50% of their running costs. Since that time, the government and the municipalities have gradually acquired greater economic and educational responsibility for the administration of these institutions.

In 1949, by grant-aiding all institutions, even those which did not cater for children from underprivileged families, the state recognised the educational objective of pre-school provision.

Towards the end of the 1960s, the first municipal institutions appeared. For the past 30 years, the authorities have been required to make all public services available to all citizens. The right to pre-school education services was also reinforced by the 1976 Social Security Act, which placed a duty on the municipalities to create the structures necessary to meet families' needs. This Act also gave the municipalities responsibility for pre-school institutions. Since 1976, independent schools have been treated on the same basis as the municipal institutions.

2. Types of provision

In Denmark, a variety of services are provided for small children. The main types of establishment are:

- *Kindergarten*-type institutions (*børnehaver*), for children aged between 3 and 6 years;

- integrated institutions (*aldersintegrerede institutioner*), for children from 0 to 6 years or older;

- municipal day-care (*kommunal dagpleje*), provided in the private homes of those recruited to provide this service, catering for children aged between 6 months and 13 years, the majority of those attending being between 6 months and 2 years old;

- day nurseries (*vuggestuer*), for children between 0 and 3 years old;

- pre-school classes in schools (*børnehaveklasser*), open to children for one year before reaching the age of compulsory school attendance at 7 years, although admission at the age of 5 is possible if the child is if considered capable of following the teaching provided;

- *puljeinstitutioner*, "alternative" independent institutions, mainly for children between the ages of 3 and 10.

3. Administration

Crèches, municipal family day-care, *børnehaver* and integrated institutions are established under the Social Security Act and are administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the pre-school classes (*børnehaveklasser*), which are subject to the *Folkeskole* Act.

In 1987, the government delegated responsibility for the financial management of pre-school provision to the municipalities. They decide on the pre-school educational structures to be set up and they may themselves establish and administer institutions, which are then considered to be municipal institutions.

Alongside these, there is also a substantial independent sector, with privately-run institutions which receive municipal funding. Since 1990, the Social Security Act has enabled private individuals, enterprises or associations to establish institutions with the help of municipal grants. The *puljeinstitutioner* were created under these new provisions. A parents' committee is responsible for managing the institution and it takes decisions on the use of the public grants and the appointment of the director and staff.

Municipalities may decide to provide family day-care in the homes of private individuals, who are selected, employed and paid by the municipal authorities.

Currently, about two-thirds of the institutions are municipal, the remainder being independent and private, essentially providing a childminding service. Both types of institution are financed in the same way.

The municipal authorities also have the function of allocating available places in the various forms of provision for which they are responsible. They decide the opening hours and the average number of pupils per group, the employment of staff in pre-school establishments, the definition of aims, and the amount of parental contributions. They supervise all measures affecting pre-school education.

Since 1 January 1993, every municipal institution must have a parents' committee. This committee enables parents to bring their influence to bear at different levels - recruitment of staff, curriculum content, cooperation with outside bodies, and certain guidelines relating to the budget.

Within each centre, the director has administrative and educational responsibility for the institution and implements the decisions of the parents' committee, as well as undertaking the day-to-day management.

The local school authorities, i.e. the municipalities, are responsible for the management of nursery classes.

4. Organisation

All forms of pre-school education are optional, including the pre-school class attached to the *Folkeskole*.

Admission arrangements

Thanks to the increase in availability of pre-school provision over the past 30 years, most parents are now able to enrol their child or children in a pre-school establishment. However, many authorities have waiting lists, particularly for services for the care of children under the age of 3. For this reason, in allocating places in pre-school centres, municipal authorities give preference to children with special educational or social needs and children referred to them by another authority or by a medical specialist. They give first priority to children from single-parent families and from those in which both parents work. In order to improve this situation, the government has decided to increase the number of places available for the care of children between 1 and 5 years of age, in order to meet all demands for places by the end of 1995.

All children are normally admitted to the nursery classes attached to the *Folkeskole* in the year in which their sixth birthday falls.

Fees and charges

Education provided in the nursery classes attached to the *Folkeskole* is free. However, parents whose children attend the various types of pre-school education administered by the municipalities pay a maximum of 30% of the real costs, exclusive of rental costs. Municipalities fix their fees according to their financial situation. In some cases, municipal authorities may decide to make additional grants in order to reduce or meet in full the cost to parents. Families on low incomes and parents whose children have special needs, such as social problems or physical or mental handicaps, are partially or completely exempt from fees. In addition, parents with several children in pre-school centres are eligible for a 33% reduction.

Opening hours and timetables

Most of the institutions administered by the municipalities (*børnehaver* and *aldersintegrerede institutioner*) are open on five days a week from 6 a.m. or 7 a.m. to about 5 p.m. Many institutions take children on a full-time or part-time basis. A smaller number of institutions are open for seven hours a day, providing part-time care only.

Pre-school classes attached to the *Folkeskole* provide activities for children five days a week, for four hours in the morning.

Formation of groups

Børnehaver range in size from 20 to 80 children, divided into groups of 20. Two or three adults supervise each group. These groups may be divided according to age or comprise children of different ages.

In day nurseries (*vuggestuer*), 30 or 40 children are divided into three or four groups. Each group consists of about 10 children, supervised by two or three adults.

Integrated institutions accommodate from 50 to 60 children. Two-year-olds are generally put into a separate group, and the other children are divided into "family groups" according to their interests and their level of development.

Municipal family day-care homes accept a maximum of 3 to 5 children of different ages. However, two adults forming an educational team may look after a group of ten children.

Staffing

In 1992/93, the child/adult ratio in pre-school classes in the *Folkeskole* was 10.4:1. In the other institutions catering mainly for children aged between 3 and 5, the ratio is much more favourable, at 4.9 : 1 in the *børnehaver* and 4.8 : 1 in the integrated institutions.

The average number of pupils in pre-school classes was 18.6 in 1992/93. Classes with more than 22 children are automatically entitled to an additional teacher to share the teaching load.

Accommodation and equipment

Municipal authorities are responsible for the management of buildings. Provision therefore varies from one area to another. In general, day-care institutions have a large room in which activities involving large groups take place and meals are served. A smaller adjoining room provides space for the children to play in small groups, or to rest. Workshops where the children can work with wood or clay are also available. Most institutions have outdoor space and facilities for outdoor activities.

Pre-school classes are generally held in a room in the *Folkeskole* to which they are attached.

Other forms of provision

Two types of provision are available to children aged between 6 and 10 years outside school hours. These are leisure centres (*fritidshjem*) and school-based leisure activities (*skolefritidsordninger*). The latter have developed in recent years and currently provide 70% of the places available to children, while decentralised leisure centres, not connected to schools, account for no more than 30% of the available places.

Some children, however, continue to attend the integrated institutions which they attended before entering the nursery class or primary school.

School-based leisure centres come under the Ministry of Education and are established by the *Folkeskole* Act. Since 1984, the municipalities have a responsibility to set up these structures. As far as management is concerned, school-based leisure activities are subject to the same rules as the *Folkeskole*, and the head teacher of the local school has administrative and educational responsibility for them.

The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for the administration of leisure centres outside schools.

The general purpose of these school-based leisure centres is to facilitate children's daily transition between either nursery or primary classes and their activities outside school hours. Pre-school staff are therefore as far as possible attached to these centres, which are located within or near schools. Many of the centres allow the children themselves to choose the activities in which they wish to participate.

School-based leisure activities and leisure centres outside school are open on average for seven to eight hours a day. Children usually have access to the centres before 8 a.m. as well as between 12 noon and 5 p.m.

The municipalities may fix the amount of the parents' financial contributions for the use of the facilities at 30% of the cost, excluding rental charges as far as school-based centres are concerned, but there are no established rules for this. The maximum parental contribution towards attendance at leisure centres outside schools is 30% of the cost, excluding rental charges.

5. General objectives

The general aim of the public institutions, municipal day-care and private institutions grant-aided by the municipalities is to create frameworks which encourage children's development, well-being and independence, in cooperation with their parents. These services are part of a number of general, preventive measures provided for children under the 1976 Social Security Act.

The purpose of this provision is to give children the opportunity for daily growth in an environment which offers both security and stimulation and enables them to forge close ties with adults. Children's spontaneous activities and games have to be combined with planned and organised group activities, so that they develop their skills in working with others.

Children must also, depending on their age and degree of maturity, become involved in organising and carrying out their activities, in order to develop a sense of responsibility towards both themselves and the community.

Pre-school education also plays an important preventive role, due to the close contacts between staff, children and their families. Staff can thus help to give necessary support to families which need it.

Nursery classes in the *Folkeskole* are aimed more specifically at facilitating the transition to primary school and preparing children for learning activities. To this end, an amendment concerning nursery classes was introduced into the *Folkeskole* Act in 1984, to the effect that children in these classes could receive the same education as those in the first two years of compulsory education.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

In principle, the staff of the *bornehaver*, integrated institutions and municipal day-care homes are all free to choose their own curricula, methods and teaching materials. However, municipalities may draw up curricula. Parents' committees also set general guidelines for the institutions' activities.

There is no set curriculum for the activities provided in the nursery classes either, but school authorities may offer guidance as regards content. The *Folkeskole* Act defines education in nursery classes as "games and other activities to promote the development of the child", in other words, not teaching in the strict sense. However, some time may be devoted to teaching certain subjects, such as Danish or mathematics.

There is no formal assessment of children. Only those children who enter the nursery classes at age 5 are individually monitored and their parents are informed whether they are considered mature enough to begin their education proper, in the *Folkeskole*.

7. Human resources and training

Since 1 January 1992, staff of the *bornehaver* and leisure centres (*fritidshjem*) have received the same training as the *socialpaedagog*. This training provides students with the educational theory and teaching skills needed for working with children, young people and adults, including those with social problems or physical or mental handicaps. While this training remains general, covering the entire social and educational spectrum, students have the opportunity to specialise during their course.

Initial training is provided in training centres (*seminarer*) and lasts for 41 months, or three and a half years, 15 months of which consists of practical placements. In-service training is also provided in the *seminarer*.

For entry to this training, applicants must be at least 18 years old and hold the diploma of one of the branches of upper secondary education. Students who have completed the tenth year of the *Folkeskole* and have work experience are also admitted.

The staff of the various pre-school institutions and the nursery classes includes both fully qualified teachers and assistants who, in some cases, have taken short training courses in education. Teaching assistants constitute about half the staff. Conditions of service and salaries are identical, irrespective of the age of the children for whom the staff are responsible.

In most cases, the staff of municipal day-care homes do not have teacher training, but optional courses are arranged and are increasingly attended.

Educational advisers are employed in an increasing number of municipalities, in particular in the largest of them, to supervise and advise pre-school education staff. In most cases, these advisers have many years of experience of these institutions as well as managerial experience and a year of in-service training.

The role of the staff entails organising the day-to-day running of the institution, school work, games and other activities, in order to promote the children's physical and intellectual development in an environment which stimulates social and language skills and encourages the development of the personality.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

In 1992, 76% of children aged 3 and 80% of children aged 4 attended a pre-school institution. These children mainly attended the *bornehaver* (more than 50%) and integrated institutions (approximately 20%).

By the age of six, 97.7% of children were attending pre-school classes, and 26% attended school-based leisure activities or other leisure centres outside school hours.

9. Current issues and trends

Municipalities are making great efforts to reduce waiting lists by setting up new facilities. Private initiatives such as the *puljeinstitutioner* are growing. These measures meet local needs by diversifying educational provision.

Cooperation with parents and the importance placed on parental participation in school management is increasing. The specific needs of parents as regards opening hours are also being increasingly taken into consideration.

The Ministry of Social Affairs currently has increased funds at its disposal for developing innovative projects, supporting local activities, and making them increasingly available.

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GERMANY

1. Historical background and legislation

Germany has a long tradition of pre-school education. The earliest day nurseries (*Kinderbewahranstalten*) for the care of children date from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The primary task of these institutions was the protection from neglect of the children of the industrial working classes while parents were working outside the home during the day. These establishments did not greatly concern themselves with the educational stimulation of their charges. By contrast, for the children of the middle classes, there were infant schools (*Kleinkinderschulen*) which complemented the education given in the family and were intended to prepare children for "real learning" at school later on.

The childcare establishments founded by Froebel from 1840, for which he introduced the name of *Kindergarten* (literally, children's garden), were totally different from the establishments known until then. Froebel was one of the advocates of mainly educationally-orientated provision and care for young children. He saw the *Kindergarten* as a complement to the child's upbringing in the family, contributing to its spiritual, emotional, creative and social development and functioning as a "care, play and occupational centre" (*Pflege-, Spiel- und Beschäftigungsanstalt*) for children.

In the course of the nineteenth century, numerous *Kindergärten* were set up in Germany based on Froebel's principles, under both voluntary (particularly church) and public (principally local authority) auspices.

In the course of the 1920 *Reichsschulkonferenz* on the organisation of the school system under the Weimar Republic, a proposal to integrate pre-school education into the public education system was discussed for the first time in Germany. This idea was not however accepted, and the *Reichsgesetz für Jugendwohlfahrt (RJWG)* (Youth Welfare Act), with which the Weimar Republic established the legal framework for the education of young persons in 1922, provided in accordance with the recommendations of the *Reichsschulkonferenz* that pre-school education should be provided as part of the child and youth welfare services. This principle continues to apply in Germany today.

The positive development of child welfare services was interrupted in 1933. The welfare organisations, which ran many of the *Kindergärten*, were taken over by the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* (National Socialist welfare service). The ousting of women from the labour market led to the closure of many *Kindergärten*. Only when female labour was again in demand, especially for the armaments industry, was there a renewal of the expansion of the *Kindergarten* system.

After the end of the Second World War, the systems of pre-school education developed along quite different lines in the then German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany.

In the former GDR, the development of the *Kindergarten* into an institution preparing for school began as early as 1949, and by 1965 its formal integration into the school system was complete. With the statutory right to a place in a *Kindergarten*, the government of the GDR ensured the provision of places for 100% of children between 3 and 6 years of age (as of 1987). This service was free of charge.

In its attribution of pre-school education to the sector of child and youth welfare services, the Federal Republic continued the tradition of the Weimar Republic. The Youth Welfare Act (*Jugendwohlfahrtsgesetz*) passed in 1952 was very close to the *Reichsjugendwohlfahrtsgesetz* of 1922. The precedence of private sector over public sector bodies in the provision of child welfare was retained. In accordance with this principle, the public authorities could only set up *Kindergärten* and other child welfare establishments where there were none available under other agencies. Moreover, in the Child and Youth Welfare Act of 1990, which replaced the 1952 Act, the precedence of other agencies over the public authorities was again retained.

The 1960s saw the beginning of lively public debate in the Federal Republic regarding pre-school education and the transition of children to the primary sector. There was detailed discussion of such questions as how far compensatory measures could improve the educational prospects of children from socially and culturally deprived backgrounds on entry to primary school, and whether lowering the age of entry to compulsory education from 6 years to 5 years might be useful. The *Bund* and the *Länder* carried out and scientifically monitored an extensive pilot programme at that time. This did not however result in a lowering of the compulsory school entry age. The public debate did nonetheless focus attention on the importance of pre-school provision and led to an accelerated expansion of the *Kindergarten* sector.

Following the restoration of the unity of Germany as a state on 3 October 1990 and the establishment of the new *Länder*, the new parliaments in these *Länder* established the legal framework for education reforms in 1991. The establishments providing pre-school education for 3 to 6-year-olds in the five new *Länder* are today part of the child and youth welfare sector.

Under the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*), power to legislate in relation to children and young persons is a function of the Federal government. This includes pre-school provision for children in establishments such as *Kindergärten* and day nurseries. The situation is however different in Bavaria, where the legislature has in the Kindergarten Act placed the *Kindergärten* in the school sector. The relevant provisions of the Federation's Child and Youth Welfare Act do not therefore apply in Bavaria.

The Federal parliament has exercised its legislative power in enacting the 1990 Child and Youth Welfare Act, under which the *Länder* are authorised to take up the framework provisions in relation to pre-school education in their own legislation. Implementation and financing of the Child and Youth Welfare Act, as a function of local government, is the responsibility of the local authorities (*Gemeinden*) in the *Länder*.

The Child and Youth Welfare Act of 1990 was amended and extended in May 1993 under the Expectant Mothers and Family Welfare Act of 27 July, 1992, by creating a legal right to a *Kindergarten* place for every child between age 3 and starting school. This legal entitlement becomes operative on 1 January 1996. The financial problems of the local authorities, particularly in the old *Länder*, are however likely to present an obstacle to this being translated into practice within the time limit.

2. Types of provision

Pre-school education provision includes all the establishments which are provided by both public and private sector child and youth welfare bodies and which accept children between the age of 3 years and entry to school. Pre-school education precedes compulsory education and is not part of the public education system.

Children under the age of 3 can be cared for in nurseries (*Krippen*) or in mixed-age groups together with 3 to 6-year-olds. In the old *Länder*, family policy assumes that the mother looks after her children herself in their earliest years, and there are consequently relatively few places available for under 3-year-olds. In the new *Länder*, on the other hand, provision was substantially greater in 1990.

The *Kindergarten* is the traditional form of institutional pre-school education for children between the ages of 3 and 6 years. In exceptional cases, children are also accepted before their third birthday. In some *Länder*, there are all-age care facilities (*Kindertagesstätten*) for children aged between 4 months and 6 years.

As well as the *Kindergarten*, there are other types of establishments and care facilities in the pre-school sector but these are of only limited importance in quantitative terms, from the point of view of the numbers of children involved.

These include *Vorklassen* (preparatory classes), which are provided only in some of the *Länder*, for 5-year-olds who have not yet reached compulsory school age but whose parents wish to give them particular help and preparation for entry to the primary school.

The *Schulkindergarten* (school *Kindergarten*), also known variously as *Vorklasse*, *Vorschulklasse*, *Vorbereitungsklasse* or *Förderklasse* (pre-school, preparatory or support class) depending on the *Land*, is intended mainly for children who have reached school age but who are not yet ready for school and whose entry has been deferred.

Alongside the establishments of institutionalised pre-school education, there is also privately-organised care for children under 6 years of age by *Tagesmütter* (childminders) who provide care, generally in their own homes, for one or more children.

The following chapters deal exclusively with the *Kindergarten* as the traditional and, in terms of the numbers of children attending, the most important form of institutionalised pre-school education in Germany.

3. Administration

The legislator has given priority to provision offered by private sector bodies in the field of pre-school education, in the interests of variety of provision. Public authorities are required to establish their own facilities only where appropriate provision has not been made, or cannot be made in good time, by other bodies. This principle has resulted in about 70% of current *Kindergarten* provision in the old *Länder* being run by voluntary organisations in the field of child and youth welfare. These are in the main the churches and welfare associations, as well as associations of parents and other groups. About 30% of *Kindergärten* are set up by public bodies, i.e. by the local authorities at various levels. In the new *Länder* at present, about 11.3% of *Kindergärten* are run by firms, 3% by the churches and the remainder by public sector authorities.

The *Kindergärten* run by voluntary bodies are subject to supervision by the *Land* and this is generally carried out by the youth welfare office (*Jugendamt*) of the *Land*. As a rule, both public and private sector youth welfare bodies receive grants from the *Land* towards the running costs of the *Kindergärten* (e.g. for staff salaries and capital projects).

Responsibility for any individual *Kindergarten* rests with the body running it, which decides the basic educational policy, i.e. the religious or philosophical principles on which the work of the *Kindergarten* is to be based; they also appoint staff and ensure that they support their basic policy. They then develop jointly with the staff the fundamental educational concepts of the *Kindergarten*. The organising body also attends to the development and maintenance of the *Kindergarten* premises, submits applications for grants and provides the financing required from its own resources.

The wide range of educational provision which the legislation on child and youth welfare requires is ensured in the *Kindergärten* particularly by those agencies which are committed to a variety of religious or humanistic principles. Consequently, parents can choose for their children from the range of local provision a form of day care corresponding to their own ideas and values.

Under the Child and Youth Welfare Act and the legislation in the *Länder*, parents have the right to participate in decisions on essential aspects of the *Kindergarten*. This right of participation is based on the parents' statutory rights in relation to the upbringing of their children, and it is exercised through consultative committees. The parents elect, in various ways according to the *Land*, their representatives to a committee which may include representatives of the organising body and the staff.

4. Organisation

Attendance at pre-school establishments is optional.

Admission arrangements

The availability of *Kindergarten* places varies greatly between the old and new *Länder*. In the new *Länder*, supply by and large meets demand. In the old *Länder*, places are however available for only about 70% of the age group. They are therefore in principle allocated on the basis of social criteria.

Fees and charges

In general, there are charges for attendance at the *Kindergarten*. Parental contributions vary from one establishment to another and from *Land* to *Land*. The amounts are usually on a sliding scale according to the parents' means, taking into account income and family size. In accordance with the child and youth welfare legislation, the parental contribution may on application be remitted in part or in whole, or met by the local youth welfare office.

Opening hours and timetables

Kindergarten opening hours are fixed by the bodies responsible for them, in consultation with the parents. They may vary from one establishment to another, depending on the circumstances of the families in the catchment area.

As a rule, the *Kindergarten* is open for at least 4 hours in the morning five days a week throughout the whole year, including school holiday periods. In some cases, supervision may also be provided over the lunch break and for 2 or 3 hours in the afternoons. In some *Länder*, *Kindergarten* opening hours have to be approved by the *Jugendamt*.

At the present time, efforts are being made to adapt *Kindergarten* opening hours to a greater extent than hitherto to the needs of families, for instance by providing care in the early morning or supervision at lunch time. Extension of the opening hours is however often limited for staffing reasons.

In some cases, the *Kindertagesstätten* provide all-day care for up to 8 or a maximum of 12 hours.

Formation of groups

In principle, groups must be of mixed ages, with children of 3 to 6 years of age grouped together.

Staffing

There are considerable differences between *Länder* in the sizes of groups and in the staffing of individual establishments.

In the old *Länder*, the sizes of groups in both all-day centres and *Kindergärten* vary from 15 to 25 children in the care of at least one educational member of staff (*Erzieher/Sozialpädagoge*) and as a rule one assistant or nursery nurse. Where the children remain at lunch time and in the afternoons, there is a general tendency to limit the groups to 20 children.

In the new *Länder*, minimum and maximum sizes of 12 and 18 respectively are prescribed for *Kindergarten* groups.

Accommodation and equipment

The rooms and the equipment of the *Kindergarten* must be suitable for children, safe in the light of their ages, and organised in such a way that appropriate education, training and care can be given. There must always be adequate outside play areas.

The number of rooms in the *Kindergarten*, the minimum size of the rooms for groups of children, of ancillary areas and of outside playgrounds are laid down by the *Länder*. In some cases, additional regulations have also been introduced applicable to all-day establishments. The Bavarian regulations may be mentioned as an example of the minimum requirements in Germany. These require a *Kindergarten* room to provide at least 2m² per child, with a side room of at least 16m² and a multi-purpose room of at least 60m². To this must be added the kitchen, toilet and ancillary areas, the dimensions of which will vary according to the numbers of children and staff in the unit. The outside playground must provide at least 10m² per child.

5. General objectives

The guidelines are contained in the 1990 Child and Youth Welfare Act, which the *Länder* adapt in the light of their conditions.

The basic task of the pre-school education establishment is to help the child to develop into an individually responsible and socially competent personality. This includes the care, education and general upbringing of the child. Pre-school education should reinforce and complement the upbringing given in the family and compensate for any deficiencies of development so as to provide optimum opportunity for the child's development and education. The development of the children's physical, mental, emotional and social abilities and potential is stimulated through appropriate play and other activities, and the children are introduced to communal living in the *Kindergarten* groups and familiarised with an organised daily routine and the basic rules of hygiene. The *Kindergarten* also has the task of facilitating children's entry to primary school according to their development.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

There is no centrally prescribed curriculum or programme. The body responsible for the establishment defines its educational principles jointly with the staff, on the basis of the essential educational aims of the *Kindergarten* and their own philosophical, religious or educational principles. The staff are responsible for putting this into practice in their work, which is based on a "situational" approach, taking account of the needs and circumstances of the individual child. This requires the teachers to observe each child's development and to have regular exchanges with parents.

The *Kindergärten* of certain bodies follow their own specific educational theories (e.g. Waldorf, Montessori).

There is no assessment of pupils' achievements in the *Kindergarten*.

7. Human resources and training

The regulations in the *Länder* require at least one specialist member of staff (educationally qualified) to be in charge of every group of children, and generally also an auxiliary.

In pre-school establishments, children are cared for by both educational and auxiliary staff; the former include both state recognised educational child and youth care staff (*Sozialpädagogen*) and state recognised educators (*Erzieher*), while the latter consist mainly of nursery nurses.

The educational staff in pre-school establishments in Germany have neither the training nor the status of teachers but are predominantly educators (*Erzieher*). They are trained in institutions at upper secondary level called *Fachschulen für Sozialpädagogik* (other designations in certain *Länder*). Their training takes 3 years, comprising 2 years' full-time education at school and a year's practical on-the-job training in a pre-school establishment under the supervision of the school. The minimum entrance qualification for training is the lower secondary school certificate (*Realschulabschluß*) or equivalent (i.e. completion of 10 years of education) and either completed relevant vocational training of at least 2 years and/or preparatory vocational training of at least 2 years, preferably in the field of social work.

Training for the diploma in social pedagogics at a *Fachhochschule* normally takes 4 years. It comprises a six-semester (three-year) course leading to the diploma and one year of practical training ending with a viva, and this leads to state recognition. In the single-stage training system in some *Länder*, 2 semesters of practical training are incorporated in the course, and students obtain both the diploma and state recognition at the end of 8 semesters (4 years).

Nursery nurses are trained in public, full-time state vocational schools (*Berufsfachschulen*). In the majority of the *Länder*, training takes 2 years, while in some it is followed by a year's practical. If certain conditions are met, the period in school can be reduced to 6 months or a year in some *Länder*. In the Rhineland-Palatinate, it consists of a year in a vocational school followed by a year of practical experience.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

Attendance rates are very low in establishments for under-3-year-olds. In 1990, places were available for only about 1.8% of children in the old *Länder*, although the rate averaged 55.4% in the new *Länder*.

In 1960, the rate of provision in the old *Länder* for the 2.4 million 3 to 6-year-olds was about 33.9%. As a result of a fall in the number of children and increasing availability of places, the rate of provision has since increased considerably. Consequently, in 1990, of the 1 981 115 children aged between 3 and 6 years in the old *Länder*, some 1 501 400 (76%) attended a *Kindergarten*, 33 723 5-year-olds (1.7%) were in a *Vorklasse* and 36 612 6-year-olds who had their entry to school deferred were in a *Schulkindergarten*.

In the new *Länder* prior to the unification of Germany, supply exceeded demand, with an average rate of provision of 113%.

Nonetheless, rates of provision in the old *Länder* vary considerably from one *Land* to another. They ranged from 103.9% in Baden-Württemberg and 97.5% in the Rhineland-Palatinate to only 51.1% and 54.1% respectively in Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein.

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GREECE

1. Historical background and legislation

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, pre-school education was provided exclusively by the family, more particularly through the mother and child relationship.

The first pre-school education institutions in Greece were introduced in 1880 by Aikaterini Laskaridou, who was influenced by Friedrich Froebel. This late start was due to the young Greek state's shortage of financial resources and the inadequate infrastructures. Fifteen years later, legislation (Law 37/1895) made provision for the financing of pre-school establishments, known as *nipiagogia*, for children from 3 to 6 years of age, which were set up under private initiative. It is from this point in time that the *Kindergarten* concept began to be replaced by that of "school".

At the end of the nineteenth century, most of the existing establishments were financed by charitable foundations.

The first initial teacher training institute, the *Helliniko Parthenagogeio*, founded in 1881 by Aikaterini Laskaridou, was also privately financed.

The first state-run pre-school establishment and the first public initial teacher training institute, known as *didaskaleio*, were founded in 1898. Candidates for training had to possess a primary school leaving certificate and pass the entrance examination in order to follow the one-year course.

In 1914, children were admitted to the *nipiagogia*, from the age of five and the pupil-teacher ratio was as high as 80 : 1. Government investment in education dates from 1929, with the publication of a decree which defined the status of nursery schools (*nipiagogia*) which were directly subject to the Ministry of Education. Under this decree, the age of entry was lowered to three-and-a-half and the pupil-teacher ratio was halved. Attendance at the *nipiagogia* was optional. The educational aims were mainly to prepare children for primary school through games and practical learning exercises.

The admissions criteria for the training colleges (*didaskaleia*) were changed in 1940 and the secondary school leaving certificate (six years) was a requirement for candidates for the entrance examination. In 1959, the *didaskaleio* were reorganised and re-named *Scholes Nipiagogon*. The training course was extended to two years. These training colleges alone could not meet all the staffing requirements for the *nipiagogia*, and a one year teacher training course was provided in schools called *pedagogikes academies*.

From 1975 onwards, the increasing number of women entering the job market accelerated the development of pre-school education, and teacher training programmes were extended to two years. Until 1980, pre-school establishments remained part of primary education and were supervised by the inspectorate for primary schools. From then on, more and more schools were established in order to meet the growing needs of the community, particularly in isolated rural areas.

In the last decade, fundamental changes have been introduced in the training of teachers. In 1982, a presidential decree authorised the creation of independent university departments responsible for training, and the first university courses were officially introduced in 1984. Since 1988, these have completely replaced training in teacher training colleges. Thus universities now provide initial training for all pre-school teachers.

2. Types of provision

There are two major types of institution for pre-school education:

- *nipiagogia*, which are the officially recognised form of nursery education. These take children aged three-and-a-half to five-and-a-half years. Most are public schools, although a few are private. They can be either incorporated into primary schools (*demotika scholia*) or located in separate buildings. The *nipiagogia* are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

- *Paediki stathmi* are private or public day-care centres for children and they provide support for families. Their infant sections (*nipiaka tmimata*) take children from the age of two-and-a-half. These centres are the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

3. Administration

The nursery schools (*nipiagogia*) may be organised by the state or the private sector. The day-care centres (*paediki stathmi*) may be organised by the state, the local authorities or the private sector.

The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is responsible for the remuneration, training and teaching activities of the staff of the public sector *nipiagogia*. The decision to open a school or to recruit additional staff members is taken jointly by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Finance. The Directorate for Primary Education is responsible for nursery schools at both the Ministry of Education and the local level (prefectures). School head teachers also have certain administrative responsibilities.

The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs is responsible for the management and operation of the day-care centres.

The costs of maintenance and minor repairs to state-run *nipiagogia* are borne by the local authorities. The heavier costs of reconstructing buildings are borne by the School Buildings Department of the Ministry of Education, together with the local prefecture and the authority concerned.

Private nursery schools are run entirely privately and receive no grants from official sources. Their operation is authorised by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The establishment of private day-care centres is subject to the approval of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

In practice, all pre-school provision tends to be largely centralised; it is regulated by presidential decrees proposed by the responsible Minister. These decrees regulate:

- the organisation and operation of establishments;
- the care of the children;
- the school holidays;
- the type of educational activities provided;
- the timetable and curriculum;
- the organisation of cultural days and events.

4. Organisation

Attendance at institutions of any type is at present optional. The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs have the power, by joint decision, to make pre-school attendance compulsory in certain regions where this appears necessary. No such decision has yet been taken.

Admission arrangements

All children aged 3 years and 6 months by 1 October of the year in which they enrol are admitted to nursery school for a period of 2 years. State schools take the place of residence of the families into account.

The state-run day-care centres generally accept children from age two-and-a-half until they enter primary school. Some centres provide a service for very young children (crèche). These centres generally have two or three sections which take children from 8 months up to 3 years. In such cases, the age of entry to the "big class" (*nipiaka tmimaka*) is set at 3 years.

In addition to residence criteria, the state-run centres take account of the family's social and economic situation. Priority is given to children from single-parent families, orphans, and children from large families. Centres run by the local authorities also take into account whether the parents work and their income.

For the nursery schools and the day-care centres organised by the state, priority is given to children living in the area where the school is located. Children living in other areas can be admitted if no provision is available to them locally, or if there is no room in existing establishments. Consideration may also be given to parents' convenience as regards travel (proximity to their work, for example).

Fees and charges

State schools are free of charge. In private schools, pupils' families pay fixed fees, reviewed annually by the Ministry of Trade. Possible additional charges are negotiated between the parents and the school's owners.

Public day-care centres are free of charge. Only meals have to be paid for, their cost varying from Drs. 5 000 to 8 000 per month, depending on the monthly income of the families.

Opening hours and timetables

The annual school timetable of the public and private nursery schools follows that of the primary schools, which have summer holidays from 15 June to 11 September, and a fortnight at Christmas and Easter. They are open for 20 hours per week, from Monday to Friday, between 8.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m.

The public day-care centres for children are open 45 hours per week, from 7 a.m. in the winter months and 6.45 a.m. during the summer. They close at 4 p.m. All the day-care centres are closed during the month of August. The opening hours and holidays in private centres are generally the same as these, but may vary according to the organising body.

Formation of groups

In the nursery schools, children are placed in age groups (3½ to 4½ and 4½ to 5½ years) when the number of children attending the school allows this.

In the day-care centres, children are grouped according to age. Section A admits children from 8 months to one-and-a-half years, section B is for children from 18 months to 3 years, and section C (the *nipiaka tmimata*) takes children between 3 and five-and-a-half years of age.

Staffing

In 1992/93, the pupil-teacher ratio was 16 : 1 in the public nursery schools and 23 : 1 in the private schools. In the same year, the average number of pupils per class in public schools was 16.6, and 20.6 in private schools.

The day-care centres are allowed to accept enrolments up to 20% above their capacity.

Accommodation and equipment

In general, buildings varying between 180 and 280 square metres are built to accommodate two groups of pre-school children, i.e. from 30 to 60 pupils. The playground covers an area of 800 to 1 200 square metres. The building generally contains one or two classrooms, a large room for group activities, an office for each teacher, toilets, and a room for storage of materials or preparation of meals.

The schools are provided with large wall panels, cupboards, shelves, and tables and chairs. Their equipment includes a library, a puppet theatre, toy shops for playing games of make-believe, easels for painting, musical instruments, recording equipment and teaching materials.

5. General objectives

The role of pre-school education in the *nipiagogia* is to promote the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of the child in preparation for primary school. The main objectives are the development of psycho-motor coordination, intellectual progress, enriching and structuring the child's experience through contact with nature and the outside world, encouraging harmonious social integration and promoting a capacity for communication and

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interaction with others, fostering a spirit of initiative in an organised environment, and developing comprehension and creative expression through oral, written and pictorial means, in particular in the fields of language, mathematics and the arts.

The main aim of the day-care centres is to ensure the nutrition, education and recreation of infants and young children who cannot receive this care in their family environment because their parents are working or for other social reasons.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

Since 1989, a new curriculum, defined in Presidential Decree 486/1989 A, has been in application in pre-school establishments.

Recommendations for daily activities provide for both time for free play in small groups in the activity corners in the classrooms of the *nipiagogia* and periods of activity whose aims and objectives are established in advance by the teacher; the latter may arise out of spontaneous or planned activities.

In the case of organised activities, the teacher adopts a methodology which involves taking into account the guidelines of the curriculum and the level of development of the children, choosing one or more areas of learning and one or more aims, and then organising the activities in accordance with these choices. The content may be developed on the basis of several different moments of experience and discovery. Teachers then assess the results of their educational activity.

7. Human resources and training

Since 1989, the initial training of teachers for all types of pre-school education has been provided by the nursery education departments of the universities. An upper secondary school diploma (*apolytirio lykeiou*), obtained after 12 years at school, and a pass in the national higher education entrance examination are required for admission to the university course.

The studies offered by the university nursery education departments last four years and include courses in psychology and education. A 1992 presidential decree requires teachers applying for a nursery teaching post both to have the university degree in education and to take part in a compulsory three-month introductory course at a regional training centre (*PEK*) which they must undertake shortly before being approved for employment.

Since 1990, in-service training programmes (*exomoiosi*) have been organised by the universities for teachers in post who completed their initial training in the former teacher training colleges (*scholes nipiagogon*). These courses, lasting a maximum of two years, lead to a qualification recognised as equivalent to that held by graduates of the university education departments.

Three-month in-service training programmes are organised every four to six years in the regional training centres (*PEK*). The aim is to update teachers' knowledge of scientific developments, new teaching methods and new teaching curricula.

The Marasleio Teacher Training College for primary school teachers (*MDDE*) offers an optional two-year training programme for working teachers under the age of 40 with a minimum of five years' professional experience. Admission to this training course is dependent on passing an entrance examination. Teachers can take this training course only once during their career.

In nursery schools, the school staff consists exclusively of teachers who, in addition to their teaching duties, take on administrative tasks. They receive educational guidance from the education adviser appointed to their prefecture and administrative instructions from the local Primary Education Directorate.

In 1987/88, the Department of Pre-school Education of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki created the Child Development Centre, which is run autonomously and based on the concept of pre-school education as an integral part of the local community. As the centre is part of a project based in 300 schools throughout Greece, the students and researchers are able to carry out research there into teaching methodology in pre-school education.

The staff employed in day-care centres are usually nursery nurses (*vrefokomes*), who are trained in accordance with the regulations laid down by the Ministry of Health. These regulations do not always correspond to those of the Ministry of Education.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

In 1990/91, the percentage of children attending nursery school provision was 59%. In 1991/92, 45 926 children aged between 3½ and 4½ years attended school, representing an attendance rate of approximately 20%. In the same year, 88 470 children in the 4½ to 5½ year-old age group were enrolled at school.

Most children - around 95% - attend public schools. In 1992, there were 5 417 public and 139 private schools.

The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs does not have complete statistics on attendance at day-care centres. It is therefore difficult to provide an exact figure, but attendance is estimated at approximately 24%.

9. Current issues and trends

Currently, the opening hours of pre-school establishments do not coincide with the working day of parents, and the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs is concerned about the problems relating to the organisation of school time.

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SPAIN

1. Historical background and legislation

The first school devoted to the education of very young children was the *escuela de Virio*, named after a Spanish diplomat who made a gift of it to the city of Madrid in 1831, to promote the education of the ordinary people.

Subsequently, Pablo Montesino's manual, published in 1840, became the vademecum of a great many teachers over half a century. The last 30 years of the nineteenth century, however, saw a major expansion in nursery school provision, under the influence of Froebel's methods, which were introduced to Spain at that time.

The first reference to nursery education in legislative texts dates from the nineteenth century, with the Moyano Act of 1857, which stipulated that "the government will ensure that nursery schools are established, at least in urban centres with a population of 10 000."

In 1945, the Primary Education Act distinguished between *escuelas maternales* for children under 4 years of age, and *escuelas de párvulos* for children aged 4 to 5. In practice, however, it was not until the 1960s that pre-school education really developed. Thereafter, economic and social developments in Spain and the integration of women into the labour force led to a rapid expansion of both nursery schools and day nurseries for children under the age of 4.

In terms of administrative organisation, it was in the General Law of 4 August 1970 on Education and the Funding of Educational Reform that pre-school education was first defined as a specific level of education. In 1985, an experimental programme was implemented, designed to develop innovative education projects at nursery school level. The results of these pilot schemes were taken into account in the drafting of the proposals for the organisation of the new pre-school education, *educación infantil*, in the law on the reform of the education system (*LOGSE*) which was passed in 1990. This resulted in a complete restructuring of the Spanish education system with, in particular, a reorganisation of the different levels of education. Amongst other things, the reform provided for pre-school education to be organised in two stages, the first for children between 0 and 3 years, and the second for those between 3 and 6 years.

The new law is however being brought into effect in stages and, until it is fully implemented, the levels established by the 1970 law still apply. Implementation of the second stage of *educación infantil* began in the 1991/92 school year. The organisation of the whole of this stage will be completed over the next few years.

2. Types of provision

Different types of institution provide pre-school education (*educación preescolar*). A remarkable range of facilities is offered, reflected in the types of schools, and in particular in the bodies or individuals responsible for them, the names of the schools (ranging from day nurseries, which provide care and supervision only, to pre-school centres with actual teaching functions), the ages of the children they admit, and the teachers' titles and professional qualifications.

a) Amongst the schools providing pre-school education and applying the 1990 *LOGSE* are:

escuelas de educación infantil, or second stage schools, for children between the ages of 3 and 6, which are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education or of the Autonomous Communities with responsibility for education;

escuelas infantiles, or first and second stage schools, for children up to the age of 3 and from 3 to 6 years old, which are the responsibility of the local authorities or of the Autonomous Communities which do not have responsibility for education;

centros de educación infantil, private centres which admit children in both age groups covered by pre-school education, up to age 6.

b) The *guarderías*, private day care centres, operate without the authorisation of the education authorities. They may accept children in several age groups and they have a mainly social welfare function. According to the *LOGSE*, these establishments have until the year 2000 to adopt the new norms and apply for the status of recognised education centres.

c) Amongst the recognised nursery schools still operating according to the norms and principles of the General Law of 1970 are:

escuelas de párvulos, or schools and pre-school units for children aged 3 to 6, or 4 to 6, attached to, or independent of, private or public general "basic education" schools and responsible to the Ministry of Education or to the Autonomous Communities which have responsibility for education.

centros preescolares, or pre-school centres, which admit children aged 2 to 6 years. These establishments are either private or under the municipalities or the Autonomous Communities which do not have responsibility for education.

The last type of education is planned to disappear as from the 1994/95 school year, with the general implementation of the 1990 law. The present document, therefore, describes pre-school education as governed by the *LOGSE* of 1990.

3. Administration

Public nursery schools (*educación infantil*) are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Autonomous Communities, and the municipalities. The regulations and basic standards in relation to curricula, admissions criteria, minimum facilities, staff qualifications, and staffing ratios, are established at national level for the whole country; each Autonomous

Community with responsibility for education can add its own regulations. Private infant education centres are required to apply the same basic standards as public institutions. Some private institutions may receive grants on the basis of the social role they fulfil.

All recognised *centros de educación infantil*, both public and private, are subject to the education inspectorate of the Ministry of Education or of the relevant Autonomous Community.

4. Organisation

Pre-school education is not compulsory.

Admission arrangements

As a general rule, the only condition of admission is the age of the child. In public institutions, admissions criteria can only be imposed when demand for places exceeds supply. The criteria defined by law are distance from home; brothers or sisters already enrolled in the school; annual family income; and children with a handicap.

Private nursery schools may establish their own criteria for the admission of pupils.

Fees and charges

In public nursery schools, education is free of charge at the second stage, for 3 to 6-year-olds. At the first stage, parents contribute towards certain running costs, such as catering and transport, teaching materials and textbooks, on a means-tested basis.

In non-grant-aided private centres, parents pay fees covering the full cost.

Opening hours and timetables

Nursery schools' hours are similar to those in compulsory education. There is usually a degree of coordination between teachers in the first stage of "basic education" and those at nursery level, so that they can use the buildings and equipment at different times.

The basic weekly timetable is set at 25 hours. The school day lasts five hours, usually divided into morning and afternoon sessions, with a possible additional period to cover the lunch break.

In private centres coming under the Autonomous Communities or the local authorities, the opening hours may be extended from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and this extended day may include mealtimes. The normal hours are from 9 or 10 a.m. to 12 noon or 1 p.m. and from 2.30 or 3 p.m. to 4.30 or 5 p.m.

Formation of groups

Children are generally placed in groups according to their ages, by year of birth. Nevertheless, within each stage, schools are free to form groups according to their own criteria.

Staffing

The pupil-teacher ratio in a class for 3 to 6-year-olds in the second stage is 25.2 : 1 in public schools and 30 : 1 in private schools. Staffing is regulated by Royal Decree 1004/1991 (Art. 13), which prescribes the maximum permitted numbers of children per teacher. These vary according to age group, from 8 : 1 for babies under one year of age to 13 : 1 for toddlers aged 1 to 2 years, 20 : 1 for 2 to 3-year-olds, and 25 : 1 for the whole second stage age group of 3 to 6-year-olds.

Accommodation and equipment

Nursery centres are usually located in, or adjacent to, the school buildings used for compulsory education. Centres which admit children from the whole nursery range (from birth to age 6) are established in separate, specially equipped buildings.

The 1991 Royal Decree specifies the minimum space required as three units per stage. The facilities must be used exclusively for educational purposes, and must have a separate entrance. A room with a minimum area of 30 square metres must be available to each unit or group. For children under the age of 2, a room must also be set aside for rest and for care of the children. Children's toilets must be provided for each unit, easily accessible and visible from the classroom.

There must be an outside playground for the exclusive use of the pre-school centre. This playground must measure at least 75 square metres for children in the first stage and 150 square metres for children in the second stage. If the centre includes both stages, the playground and the multi-purpose room can be used by both. These centres have a director's office, a secretary's office, and an adequate-sized room for the teachers.

Private centres which do not yet meet all these requirements have until the year 2000 to comply.

Furniture appropriate to the size of the children is provided for each public pre-school centre as are teaching materials in accordance with the educational model prescribed under the reform of nursery education, and an annual budget for the purchase of materials.

Other forms of provision

Alongside the usual organisation of pre-school education in nursery schools, there is also a series of actions at this level under the compensatory education scheme, arising from the need to cater for children in certain areas where special demographic circumstances make school attendance very difficult. Mention should be made of the "nursery school at home" programme, which consists of regular visits to the pupil's home by a teacher specialising in compensatory education. The teacher carries out activities with the children, provides them with learning materials, and trains the parents in the use of this material.

During the 1991/92 school year, 78 such programmes were organised under the Ministry of Education and Science, involving 507 children aged 3 to 5 years.

5. General objectives

The general objectives of all nursery education for children under the age of 6 are defined in the Royal Decree of 1991, which also established the attainment criteria required before entry to primary school. These objectives are described in the section concerning the basic aspects of the curriculum; briefly, they include awareness of the body and movement, creating a positive self-image; independent action; development of initiative and self-confidence; development of social relationships, learning to reconcile personal interests and the point of view of others, and development of cooperative attitudes; observation and exploration of the immediate natural environment and identification of the properties of the elements; use of different forms of symbolic expression to represent reality; and appropriate verbal expression in different communication situations.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

It is possible for children to have religious education if their parents so wish. In addition, the curriculum in the Autonomous Communities of the Balearic Islands, Catalonia, Galicia, Navarra, Valencia, and the Basque Provinces includes learning the relevant local language.

Under the *LOGSE* of 1990, the content of education should be organised in areas corresponding to the children's experience and development. Three areas are defined for nursery education - personal identity and independence; discovery of the physical and social environment; and communication and self-expression. In the first stage, emphasis is placed on developing movement and body control, initial expression of communication and language, the discovery of the immediate environment, and the first notions of social interaction and relationships. In the second stage, attention is focused on the development of language as a means to understanding and participating in the world around them, whilst giving them a positive self-image. At the same time, an effort is made to develop certain aspects of social behaviour, enabling them to achieve personal independence.

Nursery education should be organised in close cooperation with primary education to ensure a smooth transition to it later on.

As regards methodology, education should be based primarily on the child's experiences, activities and games in a rich and stimulating educational environment. In addition, the atmosphere must be affectionate, and confidence must reign. To make this possible, the teacher must plan all activities with care.

Assessment has to be global, continuous and formative. Assessment techniques at this level include interviews with parents and the direct and systematic observation of the children by their teachers.

7. Human resources and training

Nursery teachers are trained in university departments for the training of teachers for basic education (*Escuelas Universitarias de Formación del Profesorado de Enseñanza General*

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Básica), as are primary school teachers; teachers must also specialise in such subjects as music, physical education and foreign languages. These departments are attached to universities, and the courses last three years.

To be admitted to teacher training, candidates must hold an upper secondary school leaving certificate (*BUP*), they must have passed the preparatory year for entry to university (*COU*), and they must pass the university entrance examination.

Since the implementation of the *LOGSE* reforms, initial teacher training colleges have become *Magisterio* colleges, which can award master's degrees in nursery education, entitling graduates to teach in both stages of this level of education.

In centres for children under the age of 3, qualified senior assistants in pre-school education, or staff with a lower level vocational qualification specialising in work with young children, may form part of the staff in addition to the specialist teachers.

Teachers in post have technical support from specialised professional staff, who provide additional guidance and educational psychology services in the schools. These include interdisciplinary and early intervention teams (*equipos de atención temprana*), whose role is to develop methods to deal with or anticipate possible problems, and to propose changes in the curriculum in consultation with the teachers.

No qualifications are laid down for staff in day nurseries. Centres are licensed to operate and select their own staff.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

In 1993/94, almost half (47.4%) of all 3-year-olds participated in a nursery education programme. The rate of school attendance for children aged 4 was 99.4% and that for 5-year-olds 100%. Currently, 685 088 children attend pre-school institutions in the public sector and 365 882 in the private sector. Thus, 65.2% of children in nursery education are in the public sector.

No data are available on attendance rates at day nurseries.

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FRANCE

1. Historical background and legislation

In the French education system, there is a long tradition of viewing nursery school (*l'école maternelle*) as an early form of schooling closely associated with the primary school (*l'école élémentaire*).

The first refuge (*salle d'asile*) for the care of young children opened in Paris in 1828. D. Cochin, mayor of the 12th *Arrondissement* decided to set up this centre following a meeting in England with James Buchanan, who had established an infant school in London a few years earlier. Refuges quickly became established throughout France and, by 1840, all but four *départements* had them.

At that time, these refuges were intended for poor children from workers' families and they were regarded as a matter for the voluntary aid sector. In a report, an inspector in the Gironde wrote that they interested the rich, who maintained and visited them. However, in 1835, an ordinance instructed primary education inspectors to include refuges amongst the establishments they visited. The following year, refuges were included along with the schools coming under public education. The ordinance of 22 December 1837 defined them as charitable establishments to which children of both sexes could be admitted to receive nursery care and early education. Recommendations encouraged teaching the first principles of religious instruction, the basic elements of reading, writing and arithmetic, "improving" songs, needlework, and all types of manual activities.

From then on, the number of young children admitted by these institutions increased steadily, in particular under the Second Empire, from 1852 to 1870. In 1879, Jules Ferry, Minister for Education, approved the setting up of infant classes in primary schools. The term *école maternelle* (nursery school) came into general use to describe pre-school education establishments, and it appeared in the text of the Act of 1886.

When public, non-fee-paying, secular nursery schools were introduced, their educational aims were defined. The Act defined nursery schools as educational establishments. An educational programme was adopted in 1887, at the instigation of the educationist Pauline Kergomard. Her militant stand and her influence on the public authorities make her one of the founders of the true infant school.

The importance of pre-school education has become firmly established during the course of the twentieth century. A Decree in 1921 assimilated nursery school teachers to primary school teachers. In 1975, the Haby Law gave all 5-year-olds the right to a place in a nursery class. More recently, the 1989 Education Act (*Loi d'Orientation*) extended this right, providing for all 3-year-olds to be able to attend a nursery school or an infant class, as close as possible to home, if the family so requests.

2. Types of provision

Nursery schools accept children from the age of 2 years until entry to primary school at the age of 6. These establishments are separate from primary schools. There is a very dense network of nursery schools in urban areas.

There are also some nursery classes integrated into primary schools. Apart from the difference in their location, these classes have the same characteristics as nursery schools.

In rural areas in particular, where there are not enough pupils to form groups by ages, there are also "infant sections", in which children under 5 years of age are placed together with pupils in the *cours préparatoire*, and even with 6 and 7-year-olds in the *cours élémentaire*.

3. Administration

The communes are responsible for public nursery schools; they own the buildings and undertake the management of buildings and equipment (construction, extension, repairs and general running).

The state however remains responsible for the organisation of education and its content and for the salaries and personnel management of the teaching staff.

In private schools under contract to the state, the Ministry of Education finances the salaries of the staff and the schools' running costs. It does not meet capital expenditure (new buildings and major reconstruction work).

The inspector responsible for each region (*Inspecteur d'Académie*) ensures that public schools are properly administered and that the national directives on education are correctly implemented, in both the public and the private grant-aided sectors. At school level, the school council provides advice and makes suggestions concerning the running of the school and all other questions relevant to school life. It approves the "school plan" (*projet d'école*).

4. Organisation

Attendance at nursery school is optional; compulsory education begins at the age of 6 years.

Admission arrangements

Children who have reached the age of 2 years by the beginning of the school year, and whose health and physical and psychological maturity are compatible with school life in a group situation, can be admitted to nursery classes as far as places are available. In exceptional cases, children who reach the age of 2 between the beginning of the school year and 31 December of that year can be admitted subject to the same conditions.

The municipal authorities establish school zones for public nursery schools. To ascertain the school in which a child may be enrolled, application has to be made to the town hall in the commune in which the family lives, which issues the child's enrolment certificate. In those with more than one school, the child must attend the school in the zone determined by municipal decree.

If the number of places available is insufficient to accommodate all children under the age of 3, municipalities establish their own criteria for deciding the order of priority to be applied. These criteria are generally established in consultation with the regional inspectors, but the Ministry has not issued any directive in this matter. The criteria established by the municipalities are often based on social factors (single-parent families, both parents working etc.).

Families are free to enrol their children in a private school. In general, where the number of places is limited, private schools give priority to families living close to the school.

Fees and charges

Education is free of charge in public schools. In private schools, parents pay fees which are fixed freely by the school. Fees are generally higher in schools located in better-off areas, but more modest in less well-off areas. Fees may be reduced in the light of the parents' income.

Opening hours and timetables

As nursery schools are an integral part of the education system, the nursery school calendar corresponds to that of primary schools. Thus, the summer holidays are in July and August, and there are four other holiday periods in the course of the school year.

Schools are required to provide 26 hours of teaching per week. The distribution of these hours is left to the discretion of the school council. The inspector (*Inspecteur d'Académie*), director of the education services at the *département* level, sets the school timetable on the basis of proposals from the school councils. In general, teaching hours are spread over five days, four full days (often from 8.45 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. and from ..30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.) and one half day (Wednesday or Saturday, depending on the commune).

Outside lesson time, children are supervised during the lunch break; in some cases, they can be supervised at school in the morning or evening (*garderie*), the local authorities generally being responsible for the organisation of this service.

Formation of groups

As a general rule, the children are divided up into three sections, according to their ages: a lower section (*petite section*) for 2 to 4-year-olds; a middle section (*moyenne section*) for 4 to 5-year-olds, and an upper section (*grande section*) for 5 to 6-year-olds. This division can be applied more flexibly, according to the rate of learning, maturity and skills of each child. Thus, the teaching staff can place a child, with the parents' agreement, in the section which best meets the child's needs, even if this does not correspond exactly to its age.

Activities are usually carried out either by splitting the children of a given class into sub-groups, or by having all the children gather together around the adult for group activities, such as listening to the teacher reading aloud or taking part in psycho-motor activities.

To help to ease the transition from pre-primary to primary education, joint activities may be provided for the children in the upper section of the nursery school together with those in the *cours préparatoire* (first year of primary school) or even of the *cours élémentaire 1*.

Staffing

No staffing standards are laid down at national level. The Ministry makes a block allocation of teaching posts to each regional inspector (*Inspecteur d'Académie*), who sets the staffing standards for the individual *département* on the basis of the number of teaching posts available. The number of posts provided by the Ministry is reassessed annually.

In 1993/94, the average number of pupils in each class was 27.4 in public schools and 27.0 in private schools.

Accommodation and equipment

Local authorities are responsible for materials and equipment. The Ministry has not made any recommendations in this connection.

The situation varies, depending on the individual school and its age. As a minimum, each class has its own classroom and an area arranged so that the youngest children can have a sleep in the afternoon. There are also sanitary facilities suitable for children, a recreation area with various items of equipment such as a sand pit, and fixed or mobile outdoor equipment. Larger and/or more recent schools may also include specialised rooms such as a library, a projection room, and a motor development activity unit in a specially equipped room. There is generally an office for the head teacher, and some schools have a staff room and study for the teachers.

The resources available to each class are organised on the initiative of the teaching staff. In most cases, the available space is divided into activity areas, called *ateliers* (workshops), which are separated by low partitions; these may include a corner for make-believe games, a water games corner, a reading corner, a table games corner, and a space for group activities with the teacher. There is often a generous supply of a wide range of materials, including a variety of games, audio-visual materials, paints and craft materials.

Other forms of provision

Where nursery schools have to close due to declining numbers of pupils, primarily in rural or mountainous areas, the local mayor has a number of options for solving the problem:

a) The inter-communal nursery school (*école maternelle intercommunale*). Here, several municipalities make a joint effort to bring together the number of children necessary to open a nursery class. Classes formed in this way can either bring children together in one chosen area, independent of where the primary classes are, or be organised in teaching groups according to the ages of the children. This involves providing transport for most of the children. The inter-communal nursery school is the solution most often used.

b) Part-time classes can be arranged, where the children are taken by a teacher either for half-days or every other day. This arrangement makes it possible to offer children the indispensable foundations of early education. The rest of the time, free days and free half-days, is left to the family.

c) The mobile classroom provides a solution in sparsely populated areas. Schools which still exist in rural and mountainous areas, as well as the nursery schools or classes established there, are helped by mobile teams which provide teaching and academic support (*Equipes mobiles d'animation et de liaison académique - EMALA*). A school teacher allocated to a particular area makes regular visits to the small isolated schools in that area in a van equipped with audio-visual and teaching materials (such as a games library, books, collections of pictures, or computer materials).

5. General objectives

Pre-primary education seeks to develop children's ability to express themselves, their manual dexterity, artistic sense, and ability to mix with others, and to prepare them for learning in school. The nursery school's general objective is defined in the Decree of 6 September 1990 as "to develop children's full potential, enabling them to shape their own personalities and giving them the best chance to succeed in primary school and in life by preparing them for the later stages of learning".

Nursery school constitutes an integral part of the basic education provided to children aged 2 to 11. It corresponds to the first stage of the education system, the so-called first steps in learning (*cycle des apprentissages premiers*). It is characterised by the very great depth, range and abundance of discoveries, experiences, and achievements which accompany the child's remarkable rate of development between the ages of 2 and 6.

For the teachers, this cycle provides an ideal opportunity to observe the children carefully, to note their different rates of learning and detect any learning difficulties and possibly even handicaps.

While the whole of nursery schooling is part of the first stage of learning, the second stage, the so-called foundations of learning (*cycle des apprentissages fondamentaux*) starts in the upper section of the nursery school, which thus constitutes an essential period of transition and a bridge to the primary level.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

There is, strictly speaking, no curriculum for the pre-primary level. The official recommendations, as currently defined in the legislation of 1986, only address curriculum content. Several broad categories of activities contributing to children's overall development and preparation for primary school are identified in the law, including physical, scientific and technical activities, activities involving communication and oral and written expression, and artistic and aesthetic activities.

Teachers define their own programme of work for the day and the week. They determine the areas to be worked on, the specific aims, and possibilities of assessment.

Play has an important role in the nursery school. The school day is arranged as a succession of organised small-group situations, in which the children can choose which of the proposed activities they wish to take part in.

As regards assessment, the new organisation of stages of education is intended to enable the teaching staff to adjust their teaching methods to the learning pace and progress of each pupil.

The educational provision at each stage has to take account of any particular difficulties and individual rates of learning of each child, and this may lead to the teacher, or the teaching team meeting as the teaching council for that stage of education, dividing the pupils into groups. The teacher or teaching team is responsible for the regular assessment of the pupils' attainments.

Pupils in nursery school have a formal school record (*livret scolaire*). Teachers must monitor the children's progress throughout the year and assess their attainments regularly, particularly on entry to each stage.

No minimum level of ability is required for admission to the *cours préparatoire*, but if a pupil of compulsory school age shows certain deficiencies, remedial teaching must be provided appropriate to the seriousness of the problem.

7. Human resources and training

Since 1991, initial training for the teaching staff at the pre-primary (*école maternelle*) and primary levels has been provided by university teacher training institutes (*Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres - IUFM*), higher education institutions which have replaced the earlier training structures for teachers at the primary and secondary levels. University teacher training institutes admit candidates on the basis of an examination of their record and, where necessary, an interview.

At the end of the first year of theoretical and practical training at an *IUFM*, intending teachers for the nursery and primary levels must sit a competitive recruitment examination for entry to the teaching profession. Since 1992, this competition is open only to holders of diplomas representing at least three years of study at post-secondary level, equivalent to a first degree.

Successful candidates take the second year of training at the *IUFM* before being appointed to a teaching post in a school. The assignment of a new teacher to the nursery or primary level will depend in part on wishes expressed by the intending teacher and in part on the posts available in the *département*.

Teachers may be helped by nursery assistants (*Agents spécialisés d'école maternelle - ATSEM*) who are recruited by the local authorities on the basis of their own criteria regarding qualifications. The functions of these members of staff can vary depending on their skills and the requirements of the teachers; they may look after and prepare materials used in activities or provide valuable teaching assistance, and they often establish very important relationships with the children.

Support networks have been formed at the level of the *département*, comprising school psychologists and specialist teachers. Every school is linked to a support network and thus has access to the services of its members. Other forms of expertise are also available, depending on the local "school project", in particular in the fields of art, science, culture, and sport.

The regional inspector responsible for the administrative and educational monitoring of nursery schools in the area undertakes the supervision and assessment of teachers. Inspectors visit the schools and report on them. They help teachers to implement established policy and contribute to their in-service training.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

Between 1966 and 1985, the levels of school attendance of 3-year-olds increased from 55% to 94% and of 2-year-olds from 13% to 32%.

In 1993/94, attendance rates indicated that over one third of 2-year-olds (35%) were already attending nursery school, and practically all children over 3 years (99.1%). For children aged 4, the rate was 100%.

In 1993/94, most children in pre-school education attended a nursery school, with less then a quarter of pupils attending infant sections in primary schools. Few children were enrolled in the private sector, with some 88% of the children attending public schools. There are 19 028 nursery schools in metropolitan France, of which only 368 are private.

9. Current issues and trends

The Minister for Education has organised round-table discussions on the subject of a "New Contract for Schools". These discussions involve schools at all levels, including the nursery school and its role and curriculum content.

At the same time, new curricula are being developed for primary schools, embracing both pre-primary and primary levels. The aim is, in particular, to define new curricular content for nursery schools. These new curricula are expected to be published for the beginning of the school year in September 1995. A supporting document will be annexed, containing instructions or suggestions detailing the curriculum content and teaching methods applicable to these two levels of education.

The promotion of schooling for children from the age of 2, particularly in deprived and rural areas, is one of the measures introduced by the public authorities to combat school failure, in accordance with the provisions of the 1989 Education Act (*loi d'orientation*). This policy is pursued in the context of the New Contract for Schools, under which special help is to be given to nursery schools in educational priority areas (*zones d'éducation prioritaire*), with reductions in class sizes and increased provision for 2-year-olds.

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IRELAND

1. Historical background and legislation

The National School system was introduced into Ireland in 1831 by Lord Stanley. While infants attended school, there was no special provision for infant classes in primary schools. The main aim of educational policy at that time was the development of numeracy and of literacy in English.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Irish education became influenced by the more child-centred philosophies of education prevalent in Europe at the time. The writings of prominent educationists such as Froebel, Rousseau and Dewey expressed a dissatisfaction with the method of schooling in which the nature of the child was ignored. A change of emphasis was sought, whereby the child would be placed at the centre of the curriculum, and all studies would be subservient to the growth of the child.

Educationists were beginning to realise that the programme in primary schools was inappropriate to meet the needs of infant pupils. An emphasis on rote-learning in overcrowded classrooms was the accepted practice. This was mainly due to the inadequacy of the system of infant education in Ireland at that time, together with the lack of training of the teachers and the ages of children in large classes, coupled with the particularly bad attendance.

As early as 1885, efforts were made to introduce the *Kindergarten* principles into the infant programme, and in that year also, these became a component part of the programme for student teachers in training. While a study of the method was encouraged, it remained an optional subject of the curriculum of the training colleges for over a decade.

In 1897, a Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction was set up, under the chairmanship of Lord Belmore, to carry out wide-ranging enquiries into contemporary educational issues. A significant feature of the Belmore Commission report was the recommendation that early childhood education should be accorded a much greater prominence than heretofore. It was advocated by the Commission that the Froebelian system of education in a modified form be adopted in the Revised Programme of 1900. This was to involve an intermixture of *Kindergarten* activities with the work of reading, writing and arithmetic, with infant instruction approximating as nearly as possible to the *Kindergarten* ideal.

Although certificates of competence to teach *Kindergarten* could be obtained in the training colleges since 1885, the members of the Belmore Commission were alarmed at the limited number of students who obtained these awards.

The Programme for Infants laid down in 1898 was highly structured and most specific. The section on *Kindergarten* practice was almost identical to that which was outlined in the previous programme published in 1888, and significantly, it demanded specific exercises and set routines.

In September 1898, a new programme for training colleges was introduced which incorporated some of the new subjects recommended by the Belmore Commission. For women only, "*Kindergarten*" was henceforth to become a compulsory subject.

In 1900, a Revised Programme for National Schools was introduced. The Commissioners of National Education were aware of the difficulties which teachers would encounter as they attempted to introduce this revolutionary programme, especially in one-teacher schools. Consequently, in 1901 a new grade of teacher called **manual instructress** was employed in small mixed schools under a male teacher. Her role was to take charge of the junior pupils and also to carry out the functions of a teacher of *Kindergarten*, Needlework and Manual Instruction.

In 1905, the category of **junior assistant mistress** was introduced. This new class of teacher was employed in mixed schools, under a master, for the purpose of educating "the children of very tender years". In 1906, all schools with an average attendance of between 35 and 50 were granted permission to appoint junior assistant mistresses.

From 1900 to 1920, infant work predominated in the reports of the Inspectors and *Kindergarten* Organisers as they travelled throughout the country. Their records show an awareness on the part of inspectors of the great promise of *Kindergarten* and infant training. Recognition of the need for infant education had been established.

Shortly after issuing Rules for National Schools in 1930, which had stipulated that no child under 3 years of age could be enrolled as a pupil in any National School, the Minister for Education revised Rule 60, and in 1934 the age limit for being enrolled was then fixed at 4 years. This was further amended in 1946 to the effect that no child under 4 years of age could be allowed "to attend... or to be enrolled" in a National School.

The first playgroups appeared in 1969. An increasing number of pre-school centres have become available throughout the country.

The first standards and minimum legal requirements for day-care services for young children were established by the Minister for Health in 1985, but they are not yet in application. In the same year, the Children's Bill addressed the problem of caring for and protecting children, especially those at risk and suffering from neglect or abuse.

In 1991, the Child Care Act defined the status of a child of pre-school age. According to the definition in this Act, all children under the age of compulsory education (age 6) are considered to be of pre-school age, unless they are enrolled in a primary school. Thus, a 5-year-old child, who attends a pre-school centre or remains at home, is considered to be of pre-school age. On the other hand, another child of the same age, who is enrolled in a primary school, is not considered to have this status. At present, the responsibility of the Department of Education relates to children who are enrolled in a recognised primary school. Pre-school children, as defined, come under the aegis of the Department of Health. Section 50 of the Child Care Act gives the Department of Education a consultative and advisory role vis-à-vis the Minister of Health on the educational aspects of pre-school provision. This is however unlikely to be in operation before 1996.

The Child Care Act also proposes that the Education Department play a role in the administration of the pre-school institutions established by the Department of Health. Section 36, for example, authorises the Minister for Health, after consulting the Minister for Education, to make new regulations to improve the safety and development of children attending pre-school institutions. Section 40 deals with the problem of supervising these centres and recommends that supervision be carried out by qualified personnel, some of whom may be officials of the Department of Education.

2. Types of provision

The educational provision coming under the Department of Education is as follows.

- Children can attend the first two years of primary education in the National Schools from the age of 4. They are enrolled in "infant classes" where they follow a specific curriculum which is inspected by the Department of Education. This is therefore not pre-school education properly speaking. It is part of an eight-year programme of primary education.

- Some 54 pre-school units for children of travelling families have been established. They take children from the age of 3 years.

- A pre-school programme - "Early Start" - caters for children in the 3 to 4 age group in designated areas of disadvantage. At present, some 400 children are enrolled in eight pre-school units. Each pre-school class is staffed by a fully qualified primary teacher and a qualified child-care worker. The "Early Start" programme is a pilot project at present and will be evaluated by the Education Research Centre.

- Visiting teachers of the Department of Education provide a pre-school service for children with hearing and visual impairments and their families in their homes.

Outside primary schools, existing centres of pre-school education are very diverse and not well coordinated. These institutions are generally run by private or religious organisations. Essentially, one finds:

- playgroups, which are the most widespread type of provision in the country. There are currently 1 700 playgroups which accept children between 2 and 5 years of age. They are run by voluntary groups or individuals.

- Irish-medium playgroups (*naionraí*) which have been set up since the late 1960s in various places throughout the country. They function for two to three hours daily and cater for children aged 3 to 4 years. All the play activities are conducted through the medium of Irish. In January 1994, there were 245 *naionrai* operating throughout the country.

- day-care centres, which generally accept children between the ages of 6 months and 6 years.

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3. Administration

Articles 42 et 44 of the Constitution (1937) refer to education and *inter alia* place an obligation on the state to ensure that each child has an opportunity to receive a certain minimum education. As a consequence, it must grant access to schools, supplement and assist private initiatives, and, if necessary, establish additional services and institutions.

Infant classes in the National Schools are subject to the authority of the Department of Education and are financed by the state. There are also some independent and non-subsidised schools.

The state assumes almost the entire cost of equipping, constructing, improving and maintaining school buildings. In the case of school buildings, a grant covering a minimum of 80% of costs is paid by the state. In the case of certain schools in designated areas of disadvantage, the state grant may be increased. An annual capitation grant is paid to cover operating costs. A contribution from local sources amounting to at least 25% of the state grant must be lodged in the school account before the state grant is paid. The teaching staff is paid entirely by the state.

The Departments of Health and of Education share the responsibility of supervising private pre-school institutions administered by voluntary or religious organisations.

The Department of Health can grant financial aid to day-care centres. These funds can cover up to 70% of total costs. Subsidies are granted subject to controls and inspection to see that the minimum legal requirements and standards for day-care centres are being respected.

Playgroups can operate without any supervision. Home-based playgroups are completely private, unsubsidised and organised by parents. Community playgroups are managed by committees made up of parents and receive some subsidies from the local authorities or charitable foundations. However, since the foundation of the Pre-school Playgroups Association in 1969, some operational norms have been established by the Association. To be recognised by the Association and to receive a certificate of association, a playgroup must satisfy the Association's minimum requirements in terms of equipment, space and hygiene. Some 60% of playgroups are currently recognised and controlled by the Association.

Two organisations, the *Bord na Gaeilge* and the *Údarás na Gaeltachta*, are responsible for the establishment of Irish language playgroups, or *naíonraí*.

In 1973, those connected with the Irish language playgroups came together to form their own voluntary organisation, *Na Naíonraí Gaelacha*. *An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta Teo* was set up in 1978. It is a joint committee for the promotion of pre-school education through Irish between *Bord na Gaeilge* and *Na Naíonraí Gaelacha*. It is funded by *Bord na Gaeilge*. *Naíonraí* in *Gaeltacht* areas receive special support from *Údarás na Gaeltachta*. *An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta* helps to support existing *naíonraí* and to found new *naíonraí* wherever the demand arises.

The only formal pre-school institutions, for traveller children, are managed by local volunteer organisations. The Department of Education grants these institutions a subsidy to cover the cost of teaching and transportation.

Day nurseries are mainly financed by private initiatives. There are, however, state-aided day nurseries whose task is to provide help for "at-risk" children under school-age by meeting their particular needs. The Department of Health meets part of the cost of some 230 centres providing places for 6 000 children from problem families.

4. Organisation

All forms of pre-school education are optional, even in the small sections of the National Schools. Compulsory education begins at age 6.

Admission arrangements

Children are admitted to playgroups and day-care centres between the ages of 2 and 5, but most children are under 4 years old. The minimum age for enrolment in the infant school section of primary schools is set at 4 years.

Children are enrolled subject to availability of accommodation. It is incumbent on Boards of Management to have explicit policies regarding the enrolment of pupils. Enrolment policy takes into account the available accommodation, the level of staffing and the population trends within the catchment area of the school.

Children can be accepted in the *naíonraí* even if they do not speak the Irish language. Parents who want their children to learn Irish may enrol them as long as they are sufficiently mature to leave their parents.

Fees and charges

Attendance in the infant classes is free of charge. National Schools which demand school fees from parents are not entitled to receive state support. Transport to and from school, provided mainly in rural areas, is also free of charge.

Parents are required to contribute towards the cost of sending their children to playgroups and day-care centres. The amount varies depending on where the playgroup is held and how it is financed and managed. Parents pay the full cost when they can, but reductions are available when more than one child attends or in the case of needy families.

Opening hours and timetables

Infant classes follow the same annual schedule as primary schools. Schools are open 183 days a year. The Department of Education requires approximately 16 hours of educational activities plus 30 minutes each day of religious education. Schools are open from Monday to Friday, from 9.30 a.m. at the latest, and the school day for the infant classes ends around 1.30 p.m.

Playgroups are generally open four or five days a week from 9.30 a.m. to noon. Day nurseries are open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Children can attend either part-time or full-time throughout the year. The *naíonraí* function for two to three hours daily and cater for children aged 3 to 4 years. All the play activities are conducted through Irish.

Formation of groups

In National Schools, children in the infant section are divided into classes by age. The first year, called **junior infants**, accepts children between the ages of 4 and 5 years. The section which accepts children between the ages of 5 and 6 years is called **senior infants**. Most of the schools accept both boys and girls, at least in the infant section.

In the country as a whole, National Schools, with a few exceptions, accept fewer than 800 pupils each and almost half of them accept fewer than 100. At most, three teachers are responsible for teaching in these schools. Since 1960, there has been a policy to rationalise the use of resources in the schools. Many of the schools which had only one or two classes have been merged or closed. Despite this, 27% of the schools still have only one or two teachers. In these schools, children in the infant section are therefore grouped together with older pupils in a single class.

In playgroups, children are not necessarily grouped by ages, but may be encouraged to play together in mixed-age groups.

Staffing

In 1990, on the basis of an agreement negotiated in the context of the economic and social development programme, an improvement in the conditions in National Schools was implemented for a period of two years. In 1993 the pupil-teacher ratio fell from 25 : 1 to 24.2 : 1.

However, as most schools have, in addition to the teaching staff, personnel who are not involved in teaching activities, this ratio does not correspond to the average size of the classes. Most classes have more than 28 pupils and can go up to 35 for 4-year-olds.

Recent demographic trends have resulted in a reduction in the number of teachers required, but the Minister has ensured that all of these teaching posts will be retained. This effectively reduced the pupil-teacher ratio in 1993 to 23.4 : 1. A further revision of this agreement aims to reach a 22 : 1 ratio by 1996.

The number of pupils enrolled in a school for the purpose of the appointment and retention of teachers is the number validly enrolled on 30 September of the previous year.

In playgroups, the child/adult ratio varies between 8 and 10 children for each adult. At least two adults are responsible for each group.

Accommodation and equipment

The Board of Management is responsible for the school buildings. The government provides grants for maintenance and the purchase of materials.

The minimum amount of floor space provided for each pupil is about 1.4 square metres in primary schools and 2.5 square metres in playgroups. In the latter, where no teaching is provided, the accent is on a stimulating environment, with water, sand and toys, to enable the children to learn through play. All schools have outdoor space and facilities for outdoor activities; 100 square metres per 35 pupils is the minimum amount of outdoor play space provided.

5. General objectives

Infant classes constitute an integral part of primary education and their role is to initiate the children in formal learning.

Pre-school provision for children of travelling families, and indeed schools and special classes for traveller children, seek to prepare the children for primary school, to develop their social skills and to provide them with basic skills in reading and arithmetic.

The other pre-school centres play a role in socialising young children and aim at the global development of the child through games. They also provide supervision for children whose parents work.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

The recommended programme of instruction in the two years of the infant section is part of an integrated programme extending over the eight years to the end of primary schooling.

The present curriculum was introduced in 1971. The curriculum allows a certain flexibility in scheduling and teaching methods and includes Religion, Irish, English, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Arts and Crafts, Music and Physical Education. Emphasis is on a child-centred approach where every effort is made to involve the children as active agents in their own learning and also to provide a variety of direct experiences to act both as stimuli and bases for their learning. A combination of group and class teaching methods as well as didactic and discovery-based approaches are used to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. The programme invites infant class teachers to address the special needs of the young children by reducing formal teaching.

Teachers assess the performance of pupils in different areas of the curriculum by means of standardised tests or tests prepared by the teachers themselves.

Pre-school centres not attached to primary schools do not follow any special curriculum. Emphasis is placed on games and creativity.

7. Human resources and training

In Ireland, the teachers of 4 and 5-year-olds are primary teachers, all of whom have the same training and the same status and pay. Colleges of Education provide initial training for primary teachers. Students follow a common curriculum, which includes specialised courses on teaching children in infant classes. After three years of training, students receive a teaching certificate and a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree.

The content of the training may vary from one college to another, but they all share the same basic elements which include education courses, theoretical training in academic subjects, and teaching methods. Four to six-week courses are organised each year to provide teaching experience for trainee teachers, who are supervised by college staff.

All appointments as a teacher in a school are made by the Board of Management in accordance with the Rules for National Schools and subject to the prior approval of the Patron and of the Minister for Education. Levels of staffing are determined by enrolment figures in the school.

Playgroup staff do not usually have any special training. In the *naionrai*, *An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaiochta* provides training courses for new playgroup leaders and organises in-service courses for leaders of existing *naionrai*. It has also arranged a Group Insurance Scheme for all *naionrai* registered with the *Comhchoiste*. There are 11 part-time advisers working for *An Comhchoiste*. They are available, on a regional basis, to give information and advice as well as to organise meetings.

Staff in day-care centres hold either a national certificate awarded after two years of training (Dublin Institute of Technology, College of Catering) or have other kinds of private training such as in the Montessori method.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

In 1991, 64% of the children aged 4 attended infant classes in a National School. This rate increased to 99% for children aged 5.

Playgroups are attended by 5% of children, of whom 27% attended *naionrai*; this represents less than 1% of all children in the country. Day-care centres established by the Ministry of Health took in 2% of children in 1985. Most of them were under 4 years old.

9. Current issues and trends

There is a public debate concerning the presence of young children in primary schools, where the number of children per class is very high. At the same time, as a general rule, both parents and teachers accept the identical status given to pre-primary and primary education and that teachers should be treated equally, regardless of which level they teach.

Since the publication of the Green Paper "Education for a Changing World" in 1992, and the more recent 1993 Report of the National Education Convention, a White Paper is due to be published soon. This is to be followed by legislation which would give a significant role to all the partners in education and would ensure that the essential resources were made available to the most disadvantaged children.

Ireland has seen a considerable fall in the birth rate and structural changes in family life which have created a context in which the school is being required to share responsibility for the education and care of children with their parents. The role of parents as active partners with the school in the educational process is being increasingly recognised.

Since 1991, the active participation of parents as partners in education has been strongly recommended in a circular to school Boards of Management. In playgroups, the cooperation and responsibility of parents is very important. On the other hand, in the day-care field, they are not involved in either activities or the administration of the centres, although they may help with fund raising.

A pilot project for home/school/community liaison was set up in a number of schools in disadvantaged areas in 1993/94. The aim is to involve parents in their children's education by developing partnership and cooperation between parents and teachers to share skills, knowledge and experience. Parents' meetings help them to identify needs and to gain confidence in themselves. As for the teachers, the aim is also to help them to develop a cooperative attitude and to adopt a comprehensive approach to education.

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ITALY

1. Historical background and legislation

The nursery school (*scuola materna*) has only recently become a recognised educational institution under the Constitution of the Republic. Before the Second World War, the objective of pre-school education, with a few exceptions, was one of social welfare. This sector was left to private initiative or to organisations and associations, amongst which local authorities and religious orders played the most important role.

The earliest institutions for young children were called *asilo d'infanzia*, the first being established at Cremona by Ferrante Aporti in 1829. Aporti, who followed the Christian tradition in education, was interested in both the physical and the moral development of the child. His teaching method was mainly founded on language and pictures. By the end of the nineteenth century, there was a considerable decline in the influence of Friedrich Froebel and Aporti, and the sisters Carolina and Rosa Agazzi set up the *asilo rurale di Monpiano*. This soon became a centre of educational experiment, and their method, which was closer to the new demands of early education, became a model for education in Italy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Maria Montessori, influenced by the Agazzi method, began to adapt it to handicapped children and developed the method of education which bears her name today. Her ideas spread rapidly and her principles were applied to the education of all young children. In 1907, she opened her first *casa dei bambini* (Children's House) in Rome.

Nursery schools, however, were not subject to specific regulations under the public education system until the Gentile reform of primary education in 1923, before which they came under the Ministry of the Interior. After 1923, these establishments were turned into preparatory-level schools, called the *scuola materna*. However, implementation of the legislative provisions was still limited to the private initiatives of local bodies.

By establishing nursery schools under the Law of 18 March 1968, the state assumed direct responsibility for pre-school education, while still enabling private institutions to be set up and to receive grants.

Prior to this, the state had already established some nursery schools attached to *scuole magistrali* and *istituti magistrali* (schools providing training for teachers at the pre-school and primary levels) in which students did their teaching practice during training.

In June 1991, a new policy was formulated for education in state nursery schools, under which pre-school education is integrated into the education system proper, although it remains optional.

2. Types of provision

Today, the *scuola materna* is responsible for the education of children between the ages of

3 and 6 years. Two types of school are available, state and private nursery schools.

Children between 0 and 3 years, are admitted to crèches which may either be administered by local authorities or left to private initiative.

3. Administration

At national level, the Minister of Education approves the national plan for the establishment or closure of schools throughout the country, determines education policy, and organises the appointment, posting and, in general, the in-service training of teachers, head teachers, and inspectors. The Minister determines the amount of the grants available to non-state schools and the criteria applicable to their allocation. In carrying out these tasks, the Minister is assisted by the Nursery Schools branch of the Ministry.

At regional level, the regional council (*ente regione*) establishes a quarterly building programme covering construction, extensions, acquisitions and renovation.

At provincial level, the director of education (*provveditore agli studi*) has both an administrative and a policy function. He determines the distribution of nursery schools within the province, once he has satisfied himself that the conditions necessary for their operation are met, and he allocates the necessary funds on the basis of a plan approved by the Provincial Schools Council. The director appoints teaching staff and is in charge of the administrative and financial management of the schools. He encourages and coordinates relations with the local authorities, enabling the schools to meet the needs of families and children, taking into account the general situation and the social conditions in the areas in which they live.

At local level, the director of schools (*direttore didattico*) is responsible for a whole area or a group of areas. The director promotes and coordinates the organisation of teaching and curricula at both primary and pre-school levels and exercises administrative and managerial functions. The director is responsible for supervising private schools which request grants from the Ministry to cover part of their operating costs.

Today, one of the differences between public schools and those which are independent of the state is the freedom for private schools to choose whether or not to follow state policy in relation to teaching. Grants from public funds are awarded on condition that these schools respect the right of all pupils, or of a proportion of them, to free education and to free school meals, or only the latter, depending on their family's financial circumstances. In assessing applications, account is also taken of the number of children attending the school and the local social and economic conditions.

The needs of citizens find direct expression at local level. The mayor, implementing the decisions of the municipal council, submits to the Ministry of Education the duly supported applications for new nursery school sections, for closures, or for the relocation of existing schools within the municipality.

Work on the building and reconstruction of state nursery schools is programmed and financed from funds allocated by the regions to the local authorities, which have to submit fully documented applications. In the local development plans, every authority is required to zone land for new schools or to designate existing buildings which could be converted into schools. Private schools, however, receive partial financing for the construction or extension of their buildings, provided that the schools are run by legally recognised local welfare bodies.

4. Organisation

Admission arrangements

Enrolment in nursery schools is optional.

State nursery schools admit children between the ages of 3 and 6 years. In theory families can choose schools freely, but restrictions are in fact imposed for reasons of shortage of places. The family's place of residence is taken into account in accepting children in state schools.

Fees and charges

Attendance at nursery schools is free of charge, as are transport and canteen services, which are necessary in rural and mountainous areas. The local authorities are required to provide these services and may request a limited contribution from families, although there are exemptions for very poor families.

Opening hours and timetables

The school day in nursery schools consists of a minimum of eight hours of activities, a four-hour morning session and four hours in the afternoon. On the recommendation of the circuit council (*consiglio di circolo*), the director of schools (*direttore didattico*) can reduce the timetable for the morning session for one or more age groups, on condition that the parents of all the children agree, or can extend the timetable to a maximum of ten hours per day.

Schools may open on five or six days per week, depending on demand. Currently, the trend is towards the five-day week, from Monday to Friday.

The school year for nursery schools begins at the same time as for the other levels of education in the same region. However, education must be provided for at least ten months of the year.

Formation of groups

Nursery schools are divided into sections. Each school is generally composed of three sections, with homogeneous groups of children of the same age. However, in order to provide the service as widely as possible, mixed-age groups may be formed, with some schools in the smallest localities providing only one section.

Staffing

The minimum and maximum number of pupils in each section is established each year. For the 1993/94 school year, the standards were a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 25 pupils in each section. In sections which include handicapped children, the minimum is set at 15 (except in deprived areas and islands) and the maximum at 20.

In 1990/91 the average number of pupils in each class was 22.8. The forecast for 1994/95 is 23.2. Two teachers are generally assigned to each section, giving a pupil-teacher ratio in state institutions of 10.6 : 1.

In private schools, the organisation of sections and the minimum and maximum numbers of pupils per group are more flexible. The head teacher can choose whether or not to conform to the norms in force in the state schools. If these norms are not respected, the relevant education authority must ensure, through an inspector, that these internal arrangements do not conflict with the principles for the proper running of nursery schools as far as teaching, finance and hygiene are concerned. A negative inspection report may lead to withdrawal of grants or even closure of the school.

Accommodation and equipment

The school must be within walking distance, otherwise school transport must be provided for all those living in the area. As far as possible, the school must be situated in a green space, or at least at a distance from pollution, noise or excessive exposure to the sun.

Except in isolated areas or mountain villages, buildings must be able to accommodate a minimum of three and a maximum of nine sections. Outdoor areas must be provided for play and educational activities. The area per pupil, calculated according to the needs for the activities provided, is 6.65 square metres for a school with three sections. The classrooms are equipped with individual tables and benches, free spaces, toilet facilities, cloakrooms and dining rooms. All schools must follow the health and safety regulations. They are subject to inspection by the local health authorities and the fire service.

The equipment must be appropriate to the activities and the ages of the children. The children are provided with games for play and creative activity, material for art and crafts (paints, wax, cardboard, paper) and outdoor and indoor equipment for motor activities (slide, climbing frames, balls, etc.).

5. General objectives

The official statement of objectives for nursery schools specifies that they should "seek, within the framework of the education system, to provide a full education for free and responsible citizens who will participate actively in the life of the local, national and international community". In this context, nursery schools are required to assist children to reach the significant developmental milestones in relation to identity, independence, and cognitive skills.

To promote the development of children's identity, nursery schools aim to give them a sense of security, self-esteem, confidence in their own abilities, motivation, and curiosity. To become independent, children have to develop the ability to find their own way and to make choices independently. This means that children should be open to the discovery, internalisation and respect of universally shared values, such as freedom, respect for themselves, for others and for the environment, solidarity, justice, and a commitment to act for the common good.

Children develop their cognitive skills by being introduced to ways of experiencing, exploring, and structuring the world around them. Their language skills are developed in learning situations where they interpret messages and written texts. Nursery schools must also recognise the importance of intuition, imagination, and creativity, in order to promote aesthetic development and logical thinking.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

Teaching methods, materials and content suitable to the children's age should be used in pursuing the aims of pre-school education. At the same time, schools should not exclude shared activities with groups of children of different sections and ages, depending on the interests and aptitudes of the individual children concerned.

Within the framework set by education policy, teachers are free to organise their own teaching activities, keeping in mind the children's ages and levels of maturity, and their background. The curriculum is based on the following areas of experience: the body and movement; speech and the word; space, order, measure, objects, time, nature, messages (forms and media); the self and others.

The purpose of assessment is to enable methods and the content of education to be continuously adapted to the pupils' needs; it is carried out throughout the school year. To ensure educational continuity and avoid school failure, schools providing consecutive levels of education (in this case, pre-school and primary) are required to agree on common methods of organising and carrying out teaching activities, and to exchange information and experience.

7. Human resources and training

Nursery school teachers have until now been trained in schools called *scuole magistrali* (three-year-course), or in *istituti magistrali* (four-year-course), which are institutions at the upper secondary level. To be admitted to these establishments, applicants require a lower secondary school leaving certificate (*licenza media*).

Since the new policy was established in relation to education in state nursery schools, new provisions have been introduced in relation to teacher training. The *Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica* (*DPR*) of 31 May 1974 provided for all candidates for the teaching profession, including nursery school teachers, to have to follow four years of university training, while the Law of 1990 required a specific university degree programme to be introduced for nursery school teachers. Neither of these has been implemented yet.

The weekly teaching load for each teacher is fixed at 25 hours. Teachers are also required to spend up to 40 hours a year on other organisational and planning duties, and up to a further 80 hours a year in staff meetings and meetings with pupils' families.

Teaching activities may be suspended on Saturdays to enable teachers to plan and review their work and to assess pupils' needs.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

Since the 1981/82 school year, statistics reveal a gradual reduction in the overall numbers of pupils, which can be attributed to the declining birthrate. The number of children attending nursery schools, however, has not been affected, as the pre-school attendance rate has increased significantly.

In 1989/90, there were 812 460 children in state nursery schools, and 752 579 children in non-state schools. Thus, the public sector provided for 52% of pre-school children.

In 1992, the level of attendance of children over 3 years old reached 91.1%.

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LUXEMBOURG

1. Historical background and legislation

The *Kindergarten (jardin d'enfants)*, which saw the light of day as a product of private initiative more than a century ago, has become, over the years, a public service available to all children of pre-school age.

The nineteenth-century *Kindergarten* primarily served the needs of children from the socially disadvantaged classes, from working class families in particular, and was inspired by the teachings of Friedrich Froebel. Around 1860, the first public pre-school institutions, known as *écoles gardiennes publiques* (public nursery schools) were established. The first legal text to mention pre-school education and to provide it with a legal basis is dated 20 April 1881. This text specifies that "the Government is authorised to organise nursery schools with the agreement of the local council and the education committee ...".

Nevertheless, this legislation left the actual initiative for establishing nursery schools to local authorities, which were expected to bear the cost. It is therefore not surprising that little progress was made between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, given the reluctance of the local authorities to open schools.

It was not until 1963 that a law was passed providing for general admission to pre-school education and imposing on local authorities "the obligation to establish the type of school known as *Kindergarten (jardin d'enfants)*" wherever the numbers of children justified them. In 1964, regulations were introduced prescribing the state's contribution towards the cost of setting up, maintaining, and running these establishments, and in 1974, attendance became compulsory "for every child who has reached the age of 5 years before 1 September of the current year and who is not yet of compulsory school age". The Grand Ducal Regulation of 2 September 1992 on the admission of children to *Kindergarten* brought this age down to 4 years.

2. Types of provision

Up to the age of 4, children may attend day centres known as *foyers de jour*. Children over 4 years of age may also attend these outside class hours. These institutions come within the competence of the Ministry of the Family and Social Aid. There are also numerous private and municipal day care centres.

From the age of 4, with a few exceptions, all children generally attend a public *Kindergarten (Spillschoul)* under the aegis of a municipality and the Ministry of Education. These *Spillschoul* classes are usually attached to primary schools. In addition, in certain municipalities and in Luxembourg City, in particular, infant classes (*classes enfantines*) for children aged 3 to 4 have been set up over the past few years as a form of extension of the *Spillschoul*.

Currently, the Waldorf school is the only private school to offer a teaching programme which is entirely different from that provided in public schools.

3. Administration

The Ministry of Education defines the legislative framework and the guidelines on general objectives, curricula, general methodology, and organisation of school time.

Primary education inspectors ensure that the legal provisions are complied with in the public sector.

The teachers enjoy a relatively high degree of freedom. Schools have no head teachers at pre-school or primary level, and teachers are directly responsible to the inspectors.

Local authorities are responsible for the infrastructure of pre-school institutions, including the buildings, equipment, and teaching materials. The local council appoints the teachers and the appointments are subsequently approved by the Minister. Teachers are civil servants. The government meets two thirds of teachers' salaries, while the remaining one third is borne by the local authority.

The Parents' Association has no statutory basis. It is purely consultative and currently has little influence on the operation of the schools.

Day centres are either strictly private, and not subject to any control, or approved, and subject to the Ministry of the Family and Social Aid.

4. Organisation

Since the 1993/94 school year, *Kindergarten* attendance has been compulsory for children aged 4. Thus, both years of pre-school education are compulsory. Attendance at infant classes and day-care centres is optional.

Admission arrangements
In principle, families have no choice of school, the admission of the child to a school being determined by place (or district) of residence. The local administration informs parents which *Kindergarten* will admit their child.

Pre-school provision is currently available in all regions of the country. In rural and sparsely populated areas, provision is centralised on a joint authority basis and in these cases the local authorities concerned provide the children with free transport.

Fees and charges
Public pre-school education is provided free of charge.

There are *foyers de midi*, which provide midday meals and care for children whose parents are working, in 10 of the 118 local authority areas. Parents are charged a contribution of LFR 75 per meal.

Opening hours and timetables

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, the *Spillschoul* is open morning and afternoon, from 8 to 11.45 a.m. and from 2 to 4 p.m. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, school activities are only organised in the mornings, from 8 to 11.45 a.m.. In some local authority areas, schools are also open on Saturday mornings.

Some local authorities offer facilities which are open for the whole day. There, the *Spillschoul* operates from 7.30 a.m. to 6 p.m., thus providing care for children outside school hours. Ten of the 118 local authorities have adopted these opening hours.

Organisation of school time and planning of activities are entirely matters for the teacher. The length of lessons is not prescribed, although it is recommended that cognitive activities preparing children for school, such as pre-reading and pre-writing, should not last for more than 30 minutes at a time.

Formation of groups

The children are not generally grouped by age, first and second year groups being mixed. For some predominantly academic activities, such as pre-writing, pre-reading, and pre-number work, however, special classes are arranged for second year pupils.

Staffing

Each class has generally 18 to 22 children. The maximum is 25, a second class being formed when are 26 or more pupils.

Accommodation and equipment

A pre-school classroom usually measures 70 square meters. The most up-to-date teaching materials include games and material for pre-reading, pre-writing, pre-number work, and to awaken interest in the sciences. These materials are provided to the pupils free of charge by the local authorities.

5. General objectives

The aim of pre-school education is the child's development, not the acquisition of knowledge.

The Law of 5 August 1963 specifies that pre-school education should not be teacher-centred. The framework document drawn up by the Ministry of Education in 1991 defines the objectives of nursery education in terms of various aspects of the child's development - psycho-motor, emotional, cognitive and communication.

The extension of compulsory education to include two years of pre-school education ensures that foreign pupils receive a better grounding in language. The teaching of Letzeburgesch is reinforced in order to facilitate the integration of immigrant children in the primary schools.

Appropriate teaching materials will be devised and this part of the pre-school curriculum will be made compulsory. It is however considered important for school to be a warm and welcoming place where children feel happy.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

The framework document on pre-school education sets out clearly the aims, curriculum content and methodology of pre-school activities. Nevertheless, at pre-school level, one can hardly speak of a specific curriculum. The 1991 document is neither a scheme of work nor a set of activities to be followed.

Pre-school education is totally child-centred, active and integrated, stressing the importance of play and taking account of individual differences. Certain broad areas of activity helpful to the development of children in this age group are outlined in the framework document: physical activities, including games, dancing, and sport; musical activities, such as singing, rhythmics, dancing, and playing musical instruments; artistic activities, such as drawing, painting, modelling, block printing, and colouring; analytical activities, and mathematics.

On the other hand, given Luxembourg's special situation in having three languages (Letzeburgesch, French, and German), plus the languages spoken by immigrants and the large numbers of foreign, and particularly Portuguese, children in some nursery schools, teaching staff are encouraged to organise regular sessions of practice in Letzeburgesch (Ministerial Circular of April 1990).

In addition to conversation in Letzeburgesch, the *Kindergarten* provides opportunities for inter-cultural activity by bringing into the various projects elements from the cultural backgrounds of the children.

Teachers are completely free to choose their own methods and must assess pupils' progress themselves, except in problem cases, in which the inspector and the psycho-medico-educational team may also be involved. There is then official contact with the parents. There are neither oral nor written examinations, and no conditions are set for promotion from one class to the next.

If a child has not attained the required level of language development or the "normal" degree of physical or psychological maturity at the end of pre-school education, the teacher must notify the inspector and the pupil's parents. In certain cases, and with the parents' approval, a decision can be taken to continue the child's attendance at pre-school level by another year.

7. Human resources and training

Since 1983, initial training for teachers at pre-school and primary level has consisted of a three-year course provided by the Higher Institute of Educational Study and Research (*ISERP*), in association with the University Centre. This training is at higher education level and is available to holders of a general or technical secondary school leaving certificate, or of a foreign certificate recognised as equivalent.

Applicants are selected for the entry to the *ISERP* on the basis of their results in the national secondary school leaving examination.

Given the large numbers of immigrant children from Italy and Portugal in pre-school and primary establishments, future teachers are expected to acquire additional language skills, either in Italian or in Portuguese. They are also made aware of the need to adopt an intercultural approach.

In pre-school classes, one teacher, without an assistant, is in charge of a group of children for the whole time. In general, there are no teachers for specialised courses. However, swimming lessons, for instance, may be given by instructors, either attached to the school, if it has a swimming pool, or employed by the public swimming pool which the pupils use.

There is no class council (*conseil de classe*) and no formal consultation amongst teachers. The weekly workload of teachers in pre-school education includes 25 periods of actual teaching, plus one period which may be used for in-service training or meetings with parents.

The staff of approved day centres are graduate "educators" (3 years of post-secondary training). In the larger centres, management is undertaken by a social worker. Staff may also include non-graduate educational staff (educated to technical secondary level) and paediatric nurses.

In the non-approved centres, the qualifications of the staff are broadly comparable, even though some may still be relatively or completely unqualified.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

In Luxembourg, 95% of children attend public schools. Since the 1992/93 school year, all children are required to attend a pre-school establishment from the age of 4. In practice, 94% of this age group already attended school before it became compulsory. During the first year at school, some children continue to attend day centres outside school hours.

Approximately 5% of children aged 3 attend infant classes.

The percentage of foreign pupils in each class varies considerably from one area to another. In some schools, there is a considerable proportion (over 50%) of foreign pupils.

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NETHERLANDS

1. Historical background and legislation

During the nineteenth century, care was provided for children from the age of 2½ in day centres (*bewaarscholen*), which gave working mothers the possibility of having their children looked after whilst they were at work.

A new impulse for the education of young children came about 1860 from Froebel and his followers in the Netherlands. His method of education was aimed particularly at children from 3 years of age. Maria Montessori's method was introduced in the Netherlands about 1914. After the end of the First World War, the term *bewaarschool* began to disappear and to be replaced by a new one, *kleuteronderwijs*, meaning nursery education.

In 1956, the first legislation to deal specifically with nursery education came into force. The Nursery Education Act, under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Science, defined the operation of nursery education, the entrance requirements for pupils, whose age of entry was set at 4 years, and the qualifications required for the teaching staff. Since that time, most 4-year-olds have been attending *kleuteronderwijs*.

Up to 1985, these nursery schools for 4 to 6-year-olds under the 1956 Nursery Education Act were run separately from the primary schools, which were still subject to the Primary Education Act of 1920. Since 1985, however, they have all been integrated under the Primary Education Act (*Wet op het Basisonderwijs*) to form new-style primary schools for the entire age range from 4 to 12 years. The underlying assumption is that there should be a steady, uninterrupted process of development for children in this age group.

The Act imposes a duty on the authority responsible for the school to enable pupils to stay on the school premises under supervision during the lunch break if the parents so wish. The authority may provide the service itself, or leave it entirely to the initiative of the parents.

Consequently, if both parents are employed or studying, they have to make their own arrangements for the care of their children up to the age of 4, and for care outside school hours for children attending primary school. Informal care, involving the help of close family members, is currently the most common practice.

The percentage of women in the Netherlands who are in paid employment is relatively low. In 1990, the rate was 54%, including those working for only a few hours per week, therefore the problem of the care of young children does not arise for a relatively large number of women.

The Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs funds organised childcare through the municipalities, under the terms of the *Welzijnswet* (Welfare Act). The municipalities themselves decide whether and how to use the funds available.

The *stimuleringsmaatregel kinderopvang* (Childcare Incentive Scheme), a measure to promote childcare facilities, which came into force on 1 January 1990, is aimed at a substantial increase in the number of day-care places, in order to give women a greater opportunity to combine child rearing with work outside the home. This policy, which is implemented by the local authorities, is based on the Welfare Act which constitutes the framework for the existing forms of grant-aided day care for children. Consequently, the central government divides its annual budget for the Childcare Incentive Scheme between the municipalities in proportion to their size. In 1990, 97% of the municipalities took part in the scheme.

2. Types of provision

Children can attend *basisonderwijs* ("basic education") from the age of 4 years.

Arrangements for the care of children under the age of 4 and of school-age children outside school hours include:

- *peuterspeelzalen* (playgroups), for children aged from 2 to 4 years;
- *kinderdagverblijven* (day-care centres) and *halvedagopvang* (part-time day care centres), designed for children from 6 weeks to 4 or 5 years old;
- *gastouderopvang* (childminding), with private individuals providing day-care in their own homes for a small number of children; they are responsible to an agency which coordinates and supervises their organisation, and childminding recognised by the agency comes under the Child-Care Incentive Scheme;
- *buitenschoolse opvang* (after-school care) provides care for children aged 4 to 12 years outside school hours.

All these types of care come under the government's Childcare Incentive Scheme, with the exception of the *peuterspeelzalen* (playgroups).

3. Administration

The Primary Education Act (*Wet op het Basisonderwijs - WBO*), which came into force in August 1985, sets the guidelines for primary education. The Act sets out the general provisions for the organisation of education (education provision, the curriculum, the number of class hours and days etc.) It also defines the status of the staff, pupils (entrance requirements) and parents. In addition, there are provisions relating to the establishment and closure of schools, and funding.

Primary schools can be either public or private, but are all funded on an equal basis by the Ministry of Education and Science.

The competent authority for public primary schools is the local council, consisting of the burgomaster and councillors. Private primary schools are generally managed by the governing boards of the relevant associations or foundations. Every private primary school must be run by a fully competent body corporate, the aim of which must be to provide education on a non-profit-making basis. The most common term for the competent authority is "school board", used in both the public and private sectors.

Under the Education Participation Act of 1992 (*WMO*), every primary school is legally required to set up a participation council, comprising an equal number of elected staff and parents' representatives and with a total membership varying from 6 to a maximum of 18, depending on the size of the school.

Playgroups (*peuterspeelzalen*) are usually financed by the municipalities, but may also be funded privately. The other establishments providing care for children up to the age of 4, or those admitting older children outside school hours (*buitenschoolse opvang, kinderdagverblijven, halvedagopvang, gastouderopvang*), may also be funded and administered by either the local authorities or private organisations.

The Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare (*Nederlands Instituut voor Zorg en Welzijn, NIZW*), a national organisation responsible for services, homes, and care facilities for the elderly, the housebound, the handicapped and young people, deals with the reform and improvement of the quality of work undertaken for these groups of people.

4. Organisation

Admission arrangements

Although full-time primary schooling is compulsory only from the first school day of the month following the child's fifth birthday, almost all children start school at the age of 4.

There are no entrance conditions as regards playgroups or day centres, apart from the age of the child and the number of places available.

Fees and charges

Primary education is free. Some schools ask for a parental contribution, but this must in no way constitute an obstacle to the admission of pupils.

Children have the right to stay at school during the lunch break. The cost of lunch-time supervision is borne by the parents of those children who avail of it (about 30% of pupils).

Public playgroups are usually financed by the local authority, but may also be funded privately. Generally, they are free of charge, although occasionally a contribution is payable, varying according to the parents' income.

Parents have to contribute to the cost of day centres. The amount of the contribution is dependent on income and is subject to annual review by the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs. (In 1991, the total cost of a place in a day centre varied between HFL 12 500 and HFL 17 500 per annum. Parents' contributions, therefore, by no means cover the total cost, and the central government's contribution in that year to operations through the Childcare Incentive Scheme amounted to a maximum of HFL 5 300 per child p.a.). The remaining costs are met by the authorities from their own financial resources, as well as income from parents' contributions and payments by employers who wish to take up places.

Since 1990, local authorities have been receiving a contribution from central government towards the setting up of an agreed number of new day centres. This may be used towards the capital and running costs of the new centres.

Opening hours and timetables

The length of the school day in primary schools is established by the relevant authorities. The Primary Education Act of 1985 specifies a maximum of 5½ hours of lessons per day. The school hours in primary education are, in general, from 8.30 a.m. to 3 or 3.30 p.m., with a lunch break lasting on average one to one and a half hours. Usually Wednesday afternoon is free.

Playgroups (*peuterspeelzalen*) are usually open three days a week for 2½ to 4 hours a day.

Day centres (*kinderdagverblijven*) are open five days a week, from around 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Part-time day centres (*halvedagopvang*) are open five days a week, for a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 8 hours per day.

Formation of groups

Primary schools are free to decide on their own internal arrangements. Each class may include one or more age groups. A common arrangement is eight classes, each with children of the same age, from 4-year-olds to 12-year-olds.

The staff responsible for running playgroups and day centres are free to decide how they form their groups.

Staffing

There is no legislation on the number of children per group. In 1993, the pupil-teacher ratio in primary education was 19.4 : 1.

Day centres are organised in groups of 8 to 12 children under the supervision of 2 members of staff.

Centres for care outside school hours operate with groups of 18 children supervised by 2 members of staff.

Playgroups generally consist of groups of around 12 children.

Accommodation and equipment

The "Londo system" (named after the chairman of an inter-departmental committee) was designed as a way of funding the provision of buildings, teaching materials and maintenance in primary education. Under this system, each school receives a budget, paid to the competent authority, whether public or private. The amount is calculated on the basis of a number of indicators, such as the area of the school site, the year in which the school was built, and the numbers of teachers and pupils. These indicators are also based on the norms for school buildings, equipment and school maintenance. An important feature of the "Londo system" is that it makes clear to all concerned, on the basis of normative principles, how much money will be made available for which activities and when.

Each authority must draw up bylaws covering at least the operating conditions for day centres with regard to health and safety, group size, area and layout of accommodation, and staff qualifications.

5. General objectives

Primary schools cater for children from 4 to about 12 years of age and provide, in principle, eight consecutive years of schooling. Primary education prepares pupils for secondary education.

Primary education aims to promote cognitive and emotional development, to encourage creativity, and the acquisition of basic knowledge and of social, cultural and physical skills. This is based on a continuous process of development within the multi-cultural social environment in which the children are growing up. No specific objectives are defined for children between the ages of 4 and 5.

Day centres provide young children with a place where they can play and develop alongside children of their own age. The aim is to stimulate cognitive, social and emotional development.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

The Primary Education Act advocates an interdisciplinary approach in the teaching of sensory and physical education; Dutch; arithmetic and mathematics; English; a number of factual subjects, including geography, history, science (biology), social relationships (including civics) and religion, "self-expression", including language, art, music and handicrafts, play and movement; and the acquisition of skills necessary for daily living, such as road safety and health education. Children from different cultural backgrounds may have lessons in their mother tongue.

There are no specific recommendations or teaching methods for teachers responsible for 4 and 5-year-olds. The teacher's scheme of work is the key instrument in the planning of teaching. This provides insight into the way in which pupils' progress is assessed and reported. Academic teaching is provided as appropriate to 4 and 5-year-olds.

In January 1994, the Primary Education Evaluation Committee (*CEB*) published a report which concluded that too many subjects were included in the curriculum, leading to an overloaded timetable. The *CEB* recommended that primary education be re-evaluated in 1999.

Primary schools are free to choose their own teaching materials and these are the property of the school. They are not prescribed by central government. In the Netherlands, the production, distribution and sale of teaching materials is a private sector activity.

There are no defined programmes for children under the age of 4 in day centres.

7. Human resources and training

The teaching staff for primary schools are trained in vocational colleges at higher education level (*HBO*). Their qualification enables them to teach the entire range of subjects and all age groups in primary school. Full-time primary teacher training courses last 4 years after completion of upper secondary education, and part-time courses take between 4 and 6 years. Most of the teachers of 4-year-olds are women.

Some playgroups employ professional staff. The others are run by volunteers or parents without qualifications.

The staff employed in day centres have vocational training at upper secondary (*MBO*) or higher education (*HBO*) level. Most of these staff are women.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

In 1991/92, almost all children aged 4 (98% of boys and 99% of girls) attended primary school.

At the end of 1992, 3 766 playgroups accommodated some 191 000 children. In 1993, almost 50% of 2 and 3-year-old children attended one or the other of these groups.

In 1992, there were 1 712 establishments providing day-care (1 155 full-time centres, 153 part-time centres and 404 centres providing care outside school hours) of which 1 367 were funded by the local authorities. In the course of 1992, the local authorities leased 14 053 day centre places to companies, 9 870 of them being funded by the local authorities. In total, these centres were able to provide day care for 80 000 children in 1992. At the end of 1992, 92% of authorities were able to provide day-care facilities for young children.

9. Current issues and trends

The *OP-STAP* project has been in operation since 1988. This project is directed at ethnic minority children in the 4 to 6 year age group and their parents (particularly those from Turkey, Morocco and Surinam). The aim is to consolidate the integration of these children in the course of the first phase of their primary education.

There is also an *OP-STAPJE* project, for ethnic minority children between 10 months and 4 years of age. The objective of this project is to prevent the development of deprivation and to give these small children early preparation for primary education. These projects are financed by the Ministry of Health and Social and Cultural Affairs.

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PORTUGAL

1. Historical background and legislation

Institutionalised care of young children was introduced around 1834, with the establishment of refuges (*casas de asilo de infância desvalida*) in Lisbon, under the patronage of the King, Don Pedro IV. These institutions played a social welfare role, taking in children who were mainly from the most deprived backgrounds.

In 1878, training colleges for pre-school teachers were founded and the first pre-school establishments appeared; these were attached to the colleges and served for the practical training of intending teachers. In 1882, a *Kindergarten* was opened, called *jardim de infância* in honour of Friedrich Froebel, who was the dominant influence at that time as regards teaching aims and methods.

When the Republic was declared at the beginning of the twentieth century, legislation was introduced on early education taking account of new developments in education. The establishments of João de Deus aimed to create a Portuguese model of pre-school education, and used the *cartilha maternal* method of introduction to reading. These institutions formed an association and trained their own teachers.

During this period, training developed significantly, with the creation of specific training courses for pre-school teachers (*ensino infantil*) within the training schools for primary teachers (*escolas do magistério primario*). Teachers also received grants to enable them to study the most modern teaching methods abroad.

However, pre-school education was abolished in 1937. Too few children (only 1% of the eligible age group) were attending nursery schools and administrative costs were too high in relation to demand. Pre-school education resumed its social welfare function. It was not until the early 1950s that the educational role of pre-school education received renewed encouragement from the child welfare projects of the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia* of Lisbon.

Between 1960 and 1974, pre-school education increased considerably, both private and public, as part of the social security services. Private training schools were established and gave a new impetus to teacher training and to experimentation with new teaching methods.

Pre-school education was once again officially recognised in 1973. The state began to provide direct assistance for setting up *jardins de infância* of which the first official establishments under the Ministry of Education opened in 1978. The 1986 Act on the foundations of the education system completely redefined pre-school education.

2. Types of provision

The pre-school education system includes both public and private *jardins de infância*, of which the latter may or may not be grant-aided, under the authority of either the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Employment and Social Security. They are open to children aged between 3 and 6 years.

The Ministry of Employment and Social Security centres frequently have a day nursery (for children aged 0 to 3 years) and facilities providing care for children outside school hours.

The social services of other Ministries also provide day nurseries and *Kindergarten*-type establishments.

3. Administration

The Ministry of Education sets the educational policy for the *jardins de infância* for which it is responsible (public, private and cooperative) in association with the general inspectorate of education, which supervises them. For the other establishments, policy is established by the Ministry responsible.

In the case of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security provision, supervision is decentralised and is provided through regional social security centres (*CRSS*); Ministry of Education supervision is also decentralised and is carried out through the Regional Education Directorates (*DRE*).

In public *jardins de infância* under the Ministry of Education, local authorities are responsible for facilities, equipment and maintenance.

Social solidarity private schools (*IPSS*) are organised under the *IPSS* Union, and other private schools grant-aided by the Ministry of Education come under the Association of Private and Cooperative Educational Establishments.

The Ministry of Education provides various services such as the distribution of milk, school insurance and prostheses. School health services detect physical and psychological abnormalities and ensure that they are treated by the appropriate services. Local authorities provide suitable facilities for the establishment of nursery schools and are responsible for administering them. They also assist in the acquisition of teaching materials and in funding study visits.

Communes and municipalities meet the cost of peripatetic pre-school teachers and also make available facilities for children's activities.

These nursery schools are, according to statute, administered by a head teacher (elected, if the school is under the authority of the Ministry of Education, and appointed, if under that of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security), an education council (of head teachers and teaching staff) and an advisory board (chaired by the head teacher and composed of the teaching staff, a representative of the ancillary staff, two parents' representatives and a representative of the local authorities). The advisory board provides an opportunity for parents to be represented in management at the day-to-day level, and participation by a representative of the local authorities reinforces the links with the community.

Private nursery schools have their own management systems even where they receive public grants. The administration of private centres subject to the Ministry of Education is governed by the Act on private and cooperative education.

A committee was set up in 1990 to examine the expansion of the pre-school education network and to consider applications for new pre-school provision within the official and private networks of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment and Social Security. The essential task of this committee is to plan provision and assess needs, keep a check on facilities and operating conditions and to decide whether tripartite agreements between the two Ministries and the private social solidarity institutions are appropriate.

4. Organisation

Under the statutes concerning the *jardins de infância*, pre-school attendance is optional.

Admission arrangements

Children between the ages of 3 years and the statutory age for starting school (6 years old before 15 September) may attend *jardins de infância.*

In those establishments coming under the Ministry of Education, preference is given to children who will begin compulsory schooling during the following year and whose parents or legal guardians live or work within the *freguesia* (the smallest administrative division in Portugal) where the nursery school is located. Where the number of places available is less than the number of applications for admission, older children have priority; here, age is counted in years, months and days.

Admission to centres under the Ministry of Employment and Social Security takes into account the needs of the family and gives preference to children from the most economically or socially deprived backgrounds.

Fees and charges

Attendance at *jardins de infância* subject to the Ministry of Education is free. In private institutions supervised by the Ministry, families contribute to the running costs according to their means. As the income ceiling to qualify for a reduction is very low, only a limited number of reductions are granted.

In both public and private establishments coming under the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, families make a contribution towards the cost according to their means.

Opening hours and timetables

Ministry of Education establishments operate 25 hours a week, five hours a day, divided into morning and afternoon sessions. In most cases meals are not provided; children receive only a snack and milk. Some local authorities also provide a midday meal.

Ministry of Employment and Social Security *jardins de infância* are open between 10 and 12 hours a day (from 7 or 8 a.m. to 6.30 or 7.30 p.m.) and meals are provided.

Formation of groups

The organisation of groups varies. The constitution of classes of children all of the same age or of mixed ages may be determined by the management bodies or depend on the total number of children in the *jardim de infância;* the larger are more likely to divide the children into homogeneous age groups.

Staffing

In pre-school centres under the Ministry of Education, the number of children assigned to each teacher may in no case exceed 25. In addition, for a homogeneous group of 3-year-olds, the pupil-teacher ratio must not be more than 15 : 1.

The pupil-teacher ratio in centres under the Ministry of Employment and Social Security is about 27 : 1. The number of children per centre is generally high (about 75).

Accommodation and equipment

Standards have been prescribed for the types and dimensions of buildings for public sector provision under the Ministry of Education. The *jardins de infância* must provide play areas, both outside and inside, suitable for a range of activities. The minimum areas to be provided are 50 square metres per classroom indoors plus 150 square metres outside.

As regards private establishments coming under the Ministry of Education, the minimum area required is 40 square metres, and classrooms must have good lighting.

The equipment provided must be appropriate to the specific needs of 3 to 6-year-olds.

Other forms of provision

a) Education from visiting teachers is aimed at areas where the population is widely dispersed and where it is difficult to bring together a large enough number of children to create a *jardim de infância*. This type of education keeps children in their own community and family environment, and could become more widespread when material and human resources permit, in situations where studies show it to be appropriate.

b) Child-oriented community action is aimed at children from deprived problem areas in which there are not enough *jardins de infância*. This is an alternative form of provision pending the establishment of more *jardins de infância*. The purpose of this service is to make available to children activities which contribute to their development and ensure maximum equality of opportunity. Such activities are aimed mainly at five-year-olds in the year before they begin compulsory education.

5. General objectives

As stipulated in the Comprehensive Law on the Education System in 1986, the purpose of pre-school education is to foster the balanced development of the child's entire cognitive and emotional potential, provide moral training and develop social skills, a sense of responsibility and independence. The child should also acquire good hygiene and health habits. Another objective of pre-school education is the diagnosis of problems, handicaps or giftedness, with a view to providing the best educational guidance and help for the child's school career.

The social and educational role of pre-school education is emphasised in the centres coming under the Ministry of Employment and Social Security.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

A handbook published in 1981 by the Directorate General for "Basic Education" sets out guidelines on the educational, psychological and sociological approach in the *jardins de infância*. The role of play is emphasised, as are the importance of expression through movement, teaching of the mother tongue, drama, music, art and mathematics.

Activities in *jardins de infância* take place in a setting which gives the children, either individually or as part of a group, a range of experiences appropriate to the expression of their biological, emotional, intellectual and social needs. Activities are planned and carried out in an integrated fashion, based on the characteristics of the group of children and the local social and cultural environment.

In public *jardins de infância* under the Ministry of Education, each teacher develops an educational project, is responsible for annual planning and may choose the teaching methods which appear the most appropriate. Teachers are, however, required to justify their choice of methods in an annual evaluation report.

Throughout the year, at each stage in their work, teachers must carry out an assessment to determine whether the objectives set for each stage have been attained, and they must evaluate the progress achieved in the development of each of the children, and in their attainment of specific skills at each stage. The report also provides the teacher with a basis for deciding whether the work plan needs to be revised.

7. Human resources and training

The teaching staff of *jardins de infância* is made up of nursery teachers who have obtained the *Bacharelato*. This qualification is awarded by a teacher training college at the level of non-university higher education. Applicants to these colleges must possess a certificate of completion of (upper) secondary education and pass an entrance examination. Initial training lasts for three years. In-service training is only guaranteed to teachers in the public sector.

Public sector establishments coming under the Ministry of Employment and Social Security may recruit only staff with a qualification in education. This is however not obligatory in the private centres under the supervision of that Ministry.

In establishments coming under the Ministry of Education, nursery teachers are helped in their work by teaching assistants, of whom there is one for every 50 pupils or two classes. Their qualifications vary. Their level of training is not specified; only completion of minimum compulsory schooling is required. Supervision is by the inspectorate.

Nursery nurses (who have four years of specialised training) and social workers (with five years of higher-level training) are also employed in some of the centres under the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security. Educational monitoring is provided by experts from regional social security centres.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

In 1991/92, the public network of *jardins de infância* under the Ministry of Education provided for about three times as many children as the private network (70 712 compared to 27 383). In the official network of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, it is the private sector which caters for the majority of pupils (3 787 in the public sector, compared with 75 640 in the private sector).

According to the 1992 figures, approximately 50% of children of the eligible ages attend pre-school provision. The total rates of attendance differ according to the Ministry responsible. Of all children attending, the public network of the Ministry of Education accounts for 40%, while the private and cooperative network accounts for 15.4% and establishments under the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security for 35%. There are wide regional variations.

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UNITED KINGDOM

1. Historical background and legislation

In the United Kingdom, organised provision of care and education for young children began to appear in the late eighteenth century. Initially on a non-statutory basis, its origins were generally voluntary and philanthropic in the dawn of the industrial revolution.

One of the earliest approaches to infant education was started in 1816 by the industrialist and mill-owner Robert Owen, at New Lanark in Scotland. In his New Institution in the centre of this village, built specially for the workers, children from the age of 2 years were cared for while their mothers and older siblings worked in the mills. The ground floor of the building housed three large open rooms with open play areas for infants aged 2 to 5 years. James Buchanan, a simple weaver with a genius for teaching, who was influenced by Pestalozzi's philosophy, ran it on humanitarian lines. Buchanan also established England's first infant school, in London, in 1818.

A great promoter of infant schools in England was Samuel Wilderspin (1792-1866), who toured the country to give talks and help set up some 150 infant schools. In 1824, the London Infant School Society was formed with the object of training infant school teachers.

The Glasgow Infant Society was formed in 1827. David Stow, who was to become Owen's son-in-law, and was himself a businessman, had started a Sunday School to influence the young in the poorest part of Glasgow. Impressed by Wilderspin's school in Spitalfields, London, which was based on Owen's model, he opened his first infant school in Drygate, Glasgow, in 1828 and by 1831 there were five schools. His aim was moralistic as well as educational: "To begin with children under 6 years of age, before their intellectual and moral habits were fully formed, and consequently when fewer obstacles were presented to the establishment of good ones." Children paid two pennies per week to attend and had to be clean and clear of infection. Aiming to counteract the effects of poor social conditions, the main educational ideas in Stow's infant schools included religious training from infancy, with absence of rote learning. The monitorial (pupil-teacher) system was not used. Owen deemed that teachers for early years education should be trained to encourage questions as a means to discovery, and to provide frequent physical activity and singing, and that schools should be co-educational.

Nursery, or pre-school, education has since Owen's time reflected his ideals, but other influences, such as the ideas and methods introduced by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori and Dewey, have also been incorporated in the training of teachers.

In England and Wales, the Elementary Education Act 1870 provided for the Education Department to set up school boards in areas where the schools already provided by private initiative were not sufficient. These boards were empowered to raise a rate (local tax) to finance such provision and, if they wished, to introduce bylaws making elementary education compulsory between the ages of 5 and 13 years. Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1872, school boards in Scotland were given powers in relation to "elementary" education and to secondary education, the latter being at this stage neither compulsory nor free.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, a great variety of pre-school provision has been established to provide care and/or education for children under school age (i.e. 5 years).

The current situation in relation to the under-5s is still largely based on the major post-War education legislation, as subsequently amended, supplemented by childcare and social services provisions. The provision of pre-school education did not become widespread until the implementation of this legislation in all parts of the United Kingdom.

The Education Act 1944 had empowered local education authorities (LEAs) in England and Wales to establish institutions at the pre-school level, by requiring them to "have regard to the need for securing that provision is made for pupils who have not attained the age of five years by the provision of nursery schools or ... by the provision of nursery classes ...", i.e. for children under the age of compulsory education.

The Education (Scotland) Act 1946 and the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 1947 laid upon education authorities at local level a number of duties: these included a duty to ensure that sufficient provision was made for primary education and, in carrying out this duty, to have regard to the need to provide nursery schools and classes as part of primary school provision.

At the same time as nursery education was expanding, the local authority social work departments were empowered to provide accommodation, resources and finance for work with under-5s. This dual situation resulted in the provision of day nurseries, and the registration of pre-school playgroups and childminders, all under the aegis of the social work departments.

For instance, in the Social Work (Scotland) Act of 1968, local authorities were enabled to provide, through their social work departments, accommodation, material resources and finance in the form of grants or loans for work with under-5s.

In 1972, the Government published a White Paper for England and Wales entitled "Education: A Framework for Expansion", based on the 1967 Plowden Report on "Children and their Primary Schools". The White Paper proposed extending the range of pre-school facilities available for young children, promoting the conversion of unused primary school facilities into pre-school centres in order to increase access to such provision, on at least a part-time basis, for children aged 3 and 4.

In 1978, the Government published "Day Care and Nursery Education for the Under-Fives in Northern Ireland - Policy and Objectives", which has provided the framework for the subsequent development of services there. However, pressure on resources in recent years has limited the expansion of nursery provision to areas of social need in Belfast.

Up to 1980, government policy was aimed at a steady expansion of nursery education, but the statutory duty on authorities in England and Wales and in Scotland to have regard for the needs of children under compulsory school age was repealed by the Education Acts of 1980, and replaced by an enabling power. The extent to which this is exercised and the subsequent provision of nursery school places is variable throughout the country, depending on individual authorities' policies and priorities in the funding of their services. In Scotland, for instance, most authorities have generally maintained the level of their services. In England and Wales, many authorities are increasing provision.

Further legislative provision in the Children Act of 1989 - only parts of which apply in Scotland - makes social services and social work departments responsible for the regulation and review of day-care services for children under 8 years. This excludes, however, nursery education and primary education provision for children in that age group.

An attempt at fusing the two forms of provision made by education and by social work departments has resulted in projects such as the Strathclyde Regional Council's Pre-5 Unit, which was set up in 1987. This called for the development of flexible services and childcare schemes which extended care both before and after nursery school hours.

The Report of the Rumbold Committee entitled "Starting with Quality" was published in 1990. This was concerned with the quality of the various forms of provision for children under 5 years of age in England and Wales. One of the government's responses was to increase substantially the annual grant made by the Department for Education to the Pre-school Playgroups Association in support of its staff training, with the aim of developing the educational content of its playgroup activities.

2. Types of provision

The United Kingdom provides a wide range of pre-school education and care, including a range of facilities, public and private, statutory and voluntary, educational and social, with attendance remaining voluntary.

- **Nursery schools** are not connected to primary schools. They can be either in the public sector and organised by education authorities, or independent. Nursery schools in England and Wales admit children from the ages of 2 or 3 years. In Scotland, entry to nursery school is at 3 years only. In Northern Ireland, nursery schools admit children between the ages of 2 and 3 years. Most children attain their fourth birthday whilst in nursery school. (N.B. Compulsory schooling in Northern Ireland starts for children aged 4 years).

- **Nursery classes** organised by education authorities share some characteristics with nursery schools, but the classes are integrated administratively with primary schools. In England and Wales, some primary schools also provide full-time care in school for children under the age of 5 who are considered to be at risk. The ages for admission are as for nursery schools, except that, in Northern Ireland, nursery classes attached to primary schools do not admit 2-year-olds. There is no full-time care provision in primary schools for children at risk, although some do have pre-school playgroups operating on their premises.

- Some children of pre-school age are also enrolled in **primary classes**. This form of provision is officially considered acceptable for pre-school age children, provided that their special needs are taken into account in such things as curriculum planning, staffing and equipment.

- **Day nurseries** admit children up to age 5 in special facilities, and they are under the sole responsibility of the social services departments.

- **Nursery centres** in England and Wales admit children up to the age of 5. They are joint ventures between the local authority education and social services departments, providing both care and education.

- Other forms of private pre-school activities include **playgroups** and mother-and-toddler groups organised by families or community groups, often at the initiative of the mothers whose children attend. They operate as non-profit-making associations and cater for children up to age 5.

There are also private nurseries, workplace crèches and childminders. In certain of the larger cities in England, family centres, play centres and recreational clubs offer activities for 3 to 5-year-olds before and after school.

In some areas of Northern Ireland, particularly in Belfast, a Toy and Book Library is in operation, making quality provision available for mothers and toddlers.

3. Administration

The separate government departments charged with education and with health and social services (in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) have varying responsibilities for pre-school services in the public sector. Responsibility for the management of the services provided is shared by the corresponding statutory authorities at local level.

There is no specific legislation governing the administration of public sector nursery schools, but references to such nursery schools are included in legislation concerning the administration of the compulsory education system. Education authorities play a direct role in their organisation and are free to implement their own administrative measures.

Nursery schools and nursery classes which are set up by education authorities are subject to the relevant statutory procedures and to inspection under the usual school inspection arrangements.

In England and Wales, under the terms of the Children Act 1989, each local authority is responsible for registering all forms of independent care provision for children under 5 years of age, which must comply with the relevant criteria, and for monitoring continuing compliance.

Nursery centres, where they exist, are the joint responsibility of the education authorities and the local authority social services departments. Under the health services legislation, the local authority social services department may establish and administer day nurseries and family centres for children under the age of 5 who do not attend a nursery school. These institutions are intended, in particular, for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

In Scotland, responsibility for nursery schools and nursery classes falls to the regional education authorities, while the regional social work departments are responsible for day nurseries, and for the registration of childminders, private crèches, private nurseries and other private pre-school provision.

In all jurisdictions of the United Kingdom, independent day nurseries are privately run and often profit-motivated. They must be registered with the local authorities responsible for social services, and comply with the requirements of the appropriate child protection legislation. They are subject to inspection to ensure that safety and health standards, as regards premises and staff, are respected, but there is no control of the quality of the educational activities provided.

In Northern Ireland, pre-school provision also falls into two categories - nursery education and day care. Overall responsibility for nursery education - schools and classes - rests with the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI). At local level, responsibility for nursery schools and classes is discharged by the relevant Education and Library Board or the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). Day care, which includes pre-school playgroups, childminding, day nurseries and independent (private) nursery schools, is the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS).

Play centres and family support services are generally established by voluntary organisations and are usually located within community centres.

The four national Pre-School Playgroups Associations, for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, are noted voluntary providers of pre-school activity through playgroups and mother-and-toddler groups. The Associations provide advice, support and some financial assistance to playgroups, a considerable proportion of which are members of their respective Association. Individual playgroups are funded on the basis of modest fees paid on behalf of the children who attend, together with parental involvement. Groups may also receive grants from local authorities. Financial assistance is provided by regional fund-raising and sponsorship, and is sometimes augmented by Department of Health grants. The Scottish Pre-school Playgroups Association (SPPA), which runs pre-school playgroups, has an agreed code of practice and provides training for playgroup leaders. These leaders are paid for primarily by parental contributions.

4. Organisation

Attendance in pre-school education is optional up to the age of 5 in England, Wales and Scotland. Since 1989, compulsory primary education begins at age 4 in Northern Ireland, so that a child who reaches the age of 4 before 1 July must receive full-time primary education from 1 September of the same year.

Admission arrangements

Parents in the United Kingdom generally have freedom of choice of a pre-school institution for their child. In cases where demand for places exceeds supply, institutions admit pupils on a priority basis in accordance with their admissions criteria.

In England and Wales, admission to Local Education Authority (LEA) **nursery schools** and **nursery classes** is regulated by criteria defined by the schools on the basis of the admission policies established by each LEA. These criteria take into account factors such as the child's educational and psychological needs, place of residence, and whether any brothers or sisters already attend the school. DFE Circular 22/89, as amended, which advises LEAs, states that they should give priority to children with special educational needs in admitting children to nursery provision. The situation in Scotland is broadly similar.

In Northern Ireland, children who are below the lower limit of compulsory school and have attained the age of 4 may be enrolled as reception class pupils in a primary school, provided there is space available Admission criteria are generally laid down by the school Governors in consultation with the Education and Library Boards or the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and are outlined in the school's prospectus. Schools are encouraged to enrol children with special educational or social needs, and additional staffing is often provided to support such children.

Admission to **day nurseries** provided by the local authority social services departments, to family centres, and to combined day centres is based on the degree of the child's need for specialist help. Priority is granted on the basis of an evaluation of the benefits to be expected from external care rather than family life, and the family's ability to provide for the child's health and educational needs is also taken into account.

The admission policies of day nurseries which receive public funding do not take the employment status of parents into account except in the case of single-parent families.

Fees and charges

Public nursery schools and nursery classes are free of charge. Local social services departments are however entitled by law to require families enrolling a child in their day nurseries to make a financial contribution. Payment ranges from £3 to £60 per week.

Playgroups raise financial contributions from parents who pay a small contribution to cover the cost of heating, rent, refreshments, and other expenses.

Independent nursery schools charge fees, as do independent day nurseries.

Opening hours

Nursery schools and nursery classes in the public sector in England, Wales and Scotland are normally open five days a week during term-time. They are closed during the normal school holidays. There are two sessions in a full day and at least one-and-a-half hours of suitable activities should be provided during each session.

The majority of pupils in England attend for only one session on each school day, either morning or afternoon. In Scotland, the tendency is for 3-year-olds to attend part-time and 4-year-olds full-time, full-time opening being from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. In Northern Ireland, full-time opening is generally from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., while part-time sessions are generally of two-and-a-half hours in the morning or afternoon.

Both public and independent day nurseries admit and care for children for the entire day.

They usually open at 7.30 a.m. and close at 6.00 p.m., and they remain open throughout the year.

Playgroups offer variable opening hours based on a fixed number of sessions per week offered during either the mornings or the afternoons. The number of sessions and opening hours depends on the level of demand and the availability of staff and assistants. Playgroups are seldom open for more than ten sessions per week and they are closed during school holidays.

Family centres and family support services have flexible opening times. They offer services on a part-time, all-day, or out-of-school hours basis.

Formation of groups
Activities are mostly semi-structured, but self-chosen, and 3 and 4-year-olds mix freely. The children in day nurseries are of mixed age groups; in nursery schools, the children may be grouped according to age, depending on the size of the classes.

Pupil-teacher ratios
The Children Act 1989 guidance includes certain recommendations in relation to organisation. For public sector and private sector pre-school provision (only the latter in Scotland), this recommends a minimum of 2 members of staff for 26 children in nursery classes and for 20 children in nursery schools, one member of staff being a qualified teacher and the other a qualified nursery assistant. In combined centres, staffing ratios are the responsibility of the relevant local authority. In Northern Ireland, the ratio is one teacher and one assistant for up to 25 children, although additional staff are often provided for special needs children.

Staffing ratios for full-day care are one adult to three children aged 0 to 2 years, one to four children aged 2 to 3 years, and one to eight children aged 3 to 5 years.

Accommodation and equipment
Nursery schools and classes generally operate in purpose-built accommodation which includes well-equipped playrooms, outside space for physical activity, ancillary accommodation for other staff, utility and kitchen areas, and toilet accommodation for staff and children. Large items of equipment, including for example climbing frames and playhouses, help to promote physical skills, while smaller items such as sand and water trays and painting materials provide opportunities for imaginative play, for manipulative play and for the investigation of natural and man-made materials. Quiet areas provide opportunities for less vigorous activities, for creative activities, for books and for the development of stories, music and rhymes. Many of the learning experiences support the development of early mathematical, language and scientific learning.

In England and Wales, the recommended space standards for teaching and play rooms in nursery schools and schools with one or more nursery classes are a minimum of 2.3 square metres per pupil, while recreation areas must provide not less than 9 square metres per pupil. The Scottish regulations recommend 54 square metres for up to 20 children and 2.2 square metres for each additional child.

Playgroups are accommodated more informally in church and community halls and similar facilities and in private houses. Local guidelines advise playgroups on basic equipment, such as furniture suitable for small children, and on play equipment, which is inspected for safety at regular intervals.

The Children Act 1989 recommends the following premises and space standards in relation to full-day care in both the public and private sectors in England and Wales: for children aged 0-2 years, 3.7 square metres of clear space per child; for children aged 2-3 years, 2.8 square metres per child; and for children aged 3-5 years, 2.3 square metres per child.

5. General objectives

The principal goal of the pre-school education provided in nursery schools and classes is to develop children's social and intellectual skills. Special efforts are made to stimulate the children's ability to play and work with others, their independence, and their linguistic development. Pre-school education seeks to develop the children's physical, cognitive and social skills; their emotional, spritual and linguistic development; and to encourage them to respect the rights of others, to investigate the world around, and to develop positive attitudes to learning.

Playgroups seek to develop children's social skills and use play as a means to learning.

Day nurseries and private services generally emphasise their function as care providers and guardians for children. They ensure the children's physical well-being.

6. Curriculum, methodology and assessment

There is no prescribed pre-school curriculum anywhere in the United Kingdom, although there is some central guidance from the Education Departments.

In England and Wales, the Government recommends that the activities should be rich, diversified, balanced, and adapted to the children's age. LEAs may give advice concerning organisation and teaching programmes in nursery schools and classes, but they have no power to impose a curriculum. The management and the staff of each institution jointly determine the programme of activities.

The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) recommends that teachers, when devising a curriculum, refer to nine areas of learning - artistic, social, linguistic, mathematical, moral (civics), physical, scientific, technological, and spiritual (religion).

In Scotland, activities are similarly designed to develop physical, social and cognitive skills according to the age of the child. Education authorities advise those running nursery schools and classes on programmes of activity and these are subject to inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectors. Although there is no legal requirement to assess pupils' progress, most education authority nursery schools prepare a report based on each 5-year-old's progress.

Social work departments have the responsibility for ensuring that standards are maintained in day-care nurseries, in which emphasis is on the child's physical well-being, and in other non-educational pre-school provision.

In Northern Ireland, curriculum planning is done within the schools with the support of the Boards and the school Governors. As a basis for planning their work, the majority of nursery schools and classes use the Nursery Guidelines devised by teachers and others working in early years education and produced by the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council (NICC), now incorporated into the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). These guidelines offer a structure for planning and implementing a balanced curriculum, and from them the teachers devise their own programmes. Nursery schools and classes are inspected as part of the Nursery and Primary Inspection programme, using the same "headings" as all other schools, namely Ethos, Teaching and Learning and Management. Most schools maintain reports of children's progress and these are used in discussions with parents and may be passed to the primary schools following transfer.

7. Human resources and training of staff

The teaching staff in all state-maintained nursery schools in England and Wales is made up of qualified teachers, many of whom have received specialised training in early years education. These teachers are assisted by trained nursery nurses or assistants, many of whom hold the specialised Diploma of the National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) or a similar qualification. Teachers in reception classes in primary schools are qualified teachers who may or may not have specialist early years training.

Day nurseries, family centres, and combined day centres in the public sector are staffed mainly by qualified nursery nurses (NNEB). In the private sector, independent day nurseries and playgroups may have qualified or unqualified staff. Qualified staff can include nursery nurses holding a diploma (NNEB), State Registered Nurses (SRNs), and also teachers.

The National Nursery Examination Board, the training and accreditation board for courses in nursery nursing, does not have any minimum pre-requisites for training. Individual educational institutions specify entrance requirements, which would normally be two passes in the General Certificate of Secondary Education.

The situation is broadly similar in Scotland, staff being either teachers or nursery nurses. As regards the initial training of teachers working in nursery schools, all of whom are fully trained, qualified and registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, the courses are identical to those for primary school teachers (a Bachelor of Education degree after four years of training, or a three or four-year degree course plus one year of post-graduate training). This may be followed by specialised training in a two-year post-graduate diploma course in Early Education, which focuses on the educational needs of 3 to 8-year-olds.

Teachers of reception classes in primary schools are not required to take a particular specialisation in pre-school education, but many in Scotland have taken the Diploma in Early Education in addition to a Bachelor of Education or its equivalent. This Diploma is not compulsory. Nursery nurses who assist teachers in pre-school education, and also those in day nurseries provided through social work department funding, are trained in Further Education colleges; this requires a two-year certificate course recognised by the Scottish Nursery Nurses Board.

In Northern Ireland, too, the teaching staff comprises qualified teachers, most of whom have had some initial training for work in the early years. Not all nursery assistants, however, hold NNEB qualifications; some have relevant experience, some are qualified nurses, and more recently some have formal NNEB qualifications.

Training for teachers in Northern Ireland takes places mainly in Colleges of Education (a 4-year degree course); for nursery assistants, the National Nursery Examination Board training or equivalent takes place in Colleges of Further Education. A number of teachers have also obtained further professional qualifications in their own time, such as the Diploma of Advanced Study in Education (DASE).

Throughout the United Kingdom, the head teacher of a nursery school is responsible exclusively for the pre-school level. However, in primary schools which have nursery classes attached to them, the primary head teacher carries responsibility for both levels of education.

8. Extent of provision and attendance rates

In England in 1993, 51% of children aged under 5 attended state-maintained nursery schools or classes in primary schools. In Wales in 1991, 68.8% of children under 5 attended state-maintained nursery schools or nursery classes in primary schools. There is, however, a wide variation from one LEA to another. If those attending independent schools and the various forms of group day care provision are also taken into account, the overall participation rate for 3 and 4-year-olds is over 90%.

In Scotland, the numbers of children attending some form of pre-school provision are increasing year by year and the total percentage of 3 and 4-year-olds in some form of pre-school provision is now estimated at 87%. The numbers are higher for 4-year-olds than for 3-year-olds.

In Northern Ireland, in the 1992/93 school year, some 7 822 children attended nursery schools or classes and some 2 146 children were enrolled in reception classes in primary schools, a total of 9 968 children. Around 26 000 children reach compulsory school age and enter the primary phase each year.

9. Current issues and trends

The education needs of those below the age of compulsory education, including those attending primary classes, are currently under discussion.

In England and Wales, the "Start Right" Report on nursery education was published by the Royal Society of Arts early in 1994 and, at the request of the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Education is undertaking an inquiry into pre-school provision in those countries. A special task force is considering whether nursery education should be optional, full-time, and require graduate teachers, and it is investigating the costs of any proposed changes.

A recent Scottish Inspectorate report, "Education of Children under 5 in Scotland" (1994), notes a significant expansion in Scotland in the last 20 years in the range and variety of forms of pre-5 education and care provided by education authorities, voluntary organisations and the independent sector. It describes the characteristics of good practice in pre-school nursery education, and identifies the following issues: staff qualifications, quality of provision, links with compulsory education, external support, community needs, admission policies, attendance, and accommodation.

In Northern Ireland, the current policy framework is undergoing a wide-ranging inter-departmental review at present, and a new policy statement on early years provision is expected later this year.

* * *

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